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BASIL:

A STORY OF MODERN LIFE.

BY W. WILKIE COLLINS,

AUTHOR OF

"ANTONINA," "RAMBLES BEYOND RAILWAYS," &c.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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PART III.

[CONTINUED.]

BASIL.

I.

MANNION ! I had never suspected that the note shown to me at North Villa might have come from him ! And yet, the secrecy with which it had been delivered ; the person to whom it was addressed ; the sinister mystery connected with it even in the servant's eyes, all pointed clearly to the discovery which I had so incomprehensibly failed to make. Circumstances which should

have brought instant conviction to my mind, had not even inspired it with a momentary suspicion. I had suffered a letter, which might contain written proof of her guilt, to be taken, from under my own eyes, to Margaret Sherwin ! How had my perceptions become thus strangely blinded ? The confusion of my memory, the listless incapacity of all my active faculties, answered the question but too readily, of themselves.

“ Robert Mannion ! ” I could not take my eyes from that name : I still held before me the crowded, closely-written lines of his writing, and delayed to read them. Something of the horror which the presence of the man himself would have inspired in me, was produced by the mere sight of his letter—and that letter addressed to *me* ! To read it, seemed almost as great a degradation as to look on him, or to hold speech with him again. Could I occupy

myself with *his* words, while the dying words of Mrs. Sherwin still lived so sadly and so solemnly in my heart?

What did the letter contain? The vengeance which my own hands had wreaked on him, he was, of all men, the surest to repay. Perhaps, therefore, in these lines, the dark future through which his way and mine might lie, would be already shadowed forth. Margaret too! Could he write so much, and not write of *her*? not disclose the mystery in which the motives of *her* crime were still hidden? Whatever the contents, it was alike my duty and my interest to read this letter.

After turning to the first page, I looked around me to assure myself that I should be undisturbed. The footpaths which, on a Sunday or a holiday, would have been trodden by hundreds of pleasure-seekers, were as lonely now as if the great city lay

miles and miles away from them. In perfect solitude—amid the singing of birds, and the murmur of summer insects; with sunlight and cloud-shadow sweeping alternately over the flat, grassy surface beyond me—I read these words; the written denunciation of my deadliest enemy on earth.

“ — Hospital.

“ You may look at the signature when you receive this, and may be tempted to tear up my letter, and throw it from you unread. I warn you not to do so; I warn you to read what I have written, and to estimate thoroughly, if you can, its importance to yourself. After that, destroy these pages if you like—they will have served their purpose.

“ Do you know where I am, and what I suffer? I am one of the patients of this hospital, hideously mutilated for life by

your hand. I forbear any description of my injuries; you will guess where they have been inflicted, and you shall see them yourself when I am dismissed as cured. If I could have known certainly the day of that dismissal, I should have waited to tell you with my own lips what I now write—but I am ignorant of this. At the very point of recovery I have suffered a relapse; and am condemned to a new sojourn here, for how long or how short a time no one can yet tell.

“ You will silence any uneasy upbraidings of conscience, should you feel them, by saying that I have deserved death at your hands. I will tell you, in answer, what you deserve and shall receive at mine.

“ But I will first assume that it was knowledge—absolute knowledge—of your wife’s guilt, which prompted your attack on me. I am well aware that she has

declared herself innocent, and that her father supports her declaration. By the time you receive this letter (my injuries oblige me to allow myself a whole fortnight to write it in), I shall have taken measures which render further concealment unnecessary. Therefore, if my confession avail you aught, you have it here:—she is guilty: *willingly* guilty, remember, whatever she may say to the contrary. You may believe this, and believe all I write hereafter. Deception between us two is at an end. I write calmly, fully, frankly—write as I think—write as I will act.

“I have told you Margaret Sherwin is guilty. Why was she guilty? What was the secret of my influence over her? You will ask these questions, and I am prepared to answer them; with what purpose, you will find out as I proceed.

“But to make you comprehend what I

have now to communicate, it is necessary for me to speak of myself, and of my early life. To-morrow, I will undertake this disclosure—to-day, I can neither hold the pen, nor see the paper any longer. If you could look at my face, where I am now laid, you would know why !”

“ When we met for the first time at North Villa, I had not been five minutes in your presence before I detected your curiosity to know something about me, and perceived that you doubted, from the first, whether I was born and bred for such a situation as I held under Mr. Sherwin. Failing—as I knew you would fail—to gain any information about me from my employer or his family, you tried, at various times, to draw me into familiarity, to get me to talk unreservedly to you ; and only gave up

the attempt to penetrate my secret, whatever it might be, when we parted after our interview at my house on the night of the storm. On that night, I determined to baulk your curiosity, and yet to gain your confidence : and I succeeded. You little thought, when you bade me farewell at my own door, that you had given your hand and your friendship to a man, who—long before you met with Margaret Sherwin—had inherited the right to be the enemy of your father, and of every descendant of your father's house.

“ Does this declaration surprise you ? Read on ; and you will understand it.

“ I am the son of a gentleman. My father's family was not an old family, like your's ; his means were miserably limited ; he had few influential friends ; and his name (which I do not now bear) was unknown in that little world of large pretensions—the

world of fashion. Nevertheless he was a gentleman in anybody's sense of the word : he knew it, and that knowledge was his ruin. He was a weak, kind, careless man ; a worshipper of conventionalities ; and a great respecter of the wide gaps which lay between social stations in his time. Thus, he determined to live like a gentleman, by following a gentleman's pursuit—a profession, as distinguished from a trade. Failing in this, he failed to follow out his principle, and starve like a gentleman. He died the death of a felon ; leaving me no inheritance but the name of a felon's son.

“ While still a young man, he contrived to be introduced to a gentleman of great family, great position, and great wealth. He interested, or fancied he interested, this gentleman ; and always looked on him as the patron who was to make his fortune, by getting him the first government sinecure

(they were plenty enough in those days !) which might fall vacant. In firm and foolish expectation of this, he lived far beyond his little professional income—lived among rich people without the courage to make use of them as a poor man. It was the old story : debts and liabilities of all kinds pressed heavy on him—creditors refused to wait—exposure and utter ruin threatened him—and the prospect of the government sinecure was still as far off as ever.

“ Nevertheless he believed in the advent of this office ; and all the more resolutely now, because he looked to it as his salvation. He was quite confident of the interest of his patron, and of its speedy exertion in his behalf. Perhaps, that gentleman had overrated his own political influence ; perhaps, my father had been too sanguine, and had misinterpreted polite general promises into special engagements. However

it was, the bailiffs came into his house one morning, while help from a government situation, or any situation, was as unattainable as ever—came to take him to prison ; to seize everything in execution, even to the very bed on which my mother (then seriously ill) was lying. The whole fabric of false prosperity which he had been building up to make the world respect him, was menaced with instant and shameful overthrow. He had not courage to let it go ; to stand up among the ruins, and say before all men :— I will rebuild this rotten temple of gew-gaws, which has deserved to fall, with genuine materials, no matter how coarse and common, which shall stand for ever. He had not courage enough, or mind enough to face such an emergency as this ; so he took refuge from it in a crime.

“ He forged a bond, to prop up his credit for a little time longer. The name

he made use of was the name of his patron. In doing this, he believed—as all men who commit crime believe—that he had the best possible chance of escaping consequences. In the first place, he might get the long-expected situation in time to repay the amount of the bond before detection. In the second place, he had almost the certainty of a legacy from a rich relative, old and in ill-health, whose death might be fairly expected from day to day. If both these prospects failed (and they *did* fail), there was still a third chance—the chance that his rich patron would rather pay the money than appear against him. In those days they hung for forgery. My father believed it to be impossible that a man at whose table he had sat, whose relatives and friends he had amused and instructed by his talents, in many and many an evening of social intercourse, would be the

man to give evidence which should condemn him to be hanged on the public scaffold.

“He was wrong. The wealthy patron held strict principles of honour which made no allowance for temptations and weaknesses; and was moreover influenced by high-flown notions of his responsibilities as a legislator (he was a member of Parliament) to the laws of his country. He appeared accordingly, and gave evidence against the prisoner; who was found guilty, and left for execution.

“Then, when it was too late, this man of pitiless honour, thought himself at last justified in leaning to the side of mercy, and employed his utmost interest, in every direction, to obtain a mitigation of the sentence to transportation for life. The application failed; even a reprieve of a few days was denied. At the appointed time, my father died on the scaffold by the hangman’s hand.

“Have you suspected, while reading this part of my letter, who the high-born gentleman was whose evidence hung him? If you have not, I will tell you. That gentleman was *your father*. You will now wonder no longer how I could have inherited the right to be *his* enemy, and the enemy of all who are of his blood.

“The shock of her husband’s death by licensed strangling, deprived my mother of reason. She lived a few months after his execution; but never recovered her faculties. I was their only child; and was left penniless to begin life as the son of a father who had been hanged, and of a mother who had died in a public madhouse.

“But more of myself to-morrow—my letter will be a long one: I must pause often over it, as I pause to-day.”

“ Well: I started in life with the hangman’s mark on me—with the parent’s shame for the son’s reputation. Wherever I went, whatever friends I kept, whatever acquaintances I made — people knew how my father had died; and showed that they knew it. Not so much by shunning and staring at me (vile as human nature is, there were not many who did that) as by insulting me with over-acted sympathy, and elaborate anxiety to sham entire ignorance of my father’s fate. The gallows-brand was on my forehead; but they were too benevolently blind to see it. The gallows-infamy was my inheritance; but they were too resolutely generous to discover it! This was hard to bear—however, I was strong-hearted even then, when my sensations were quick, and my sympathies young: so I bore it.

“ My only weakness was my father’s

weakness—the notion that I was born to a station ready made for me, and that the great use of my life was to live up to it. My station ! I battled for that with the world for years and years, before I discovered that the highest of all stations is the station a man makes for himself; and the lowest, the station that is made for him by others.

“At starting in life, your father wrote to make me offers of assistance—assistance, after he had ruined me ! Assistance to the child, from hands which had tied the rope round the parent’s neck ! I sent him back his letter. He knew that I was his enemy, his son’s enemy, and his son’s sons enemy, as long as I lived. I never heard from him again.

“Trusting boldly to myself to carve out my own way, and to live down my undeserved ignominy ; resolving in the pride

of my integrity to combat openly and fairly with misfortune, I shrank, at first, from disowning my parentage and abandoning my father's name. Standing on my own character, confiding in my intellect and my perseverance, I tried pursuit after pursuit, and was beaten afresh at every new effort. Whichever way I turned, the gallows still rose as the same immoveable obstacle between me and fortune, between me and station, between me and my fellow-men. I was morbidly sensitive on this point. The slightest references to my father's fate, however remote or accidental, curdled my blood. I saw open insult, or humiliating compassion, or forced forbearance, in the look and manner of every man about me. So I broke off with old friends, and tried new; and, in seeking fresh pursuits, sought fresh connections, where my father's infamy might be unknown. And still I was constant

to nothing ; because, wherever I went, the old stain always broke out afresh, just at the moment when I had deceived myself into the belief that it was utterly effaced. I had a warm heart then—a quick, sensitive heart : it was some time before it turned to stone, and felt nothing. Those were the days when failure and humiliation could still draw tears from me : that epoch in my life is marked in my memory as the epoch when I could weep.

“At last, I gave way before difficulty, and conceded the first step to the calamity which had stood front to front with me so long. I left the neighbourhood where I was known, and assumed the name of a school-fellow who had died. For some time this succeeded ; but the curse of my father’s death followed me, though I saw it not. After various employments—still, mind, the employments of a gentleman !—had first

supported, then failed me, I became an usher at a school. It was there that my false name was detected, and my identity discovered again—I never knew through whom. The exposure was effected by some enemy, anonymously. For several days, I thought everybody in the school treated me in an altered way. The cause came out, first in whispers, then in reckless jests, while I was taking care of the boys in the playground. In the fury of the moment (I had not mastered rage yet, as I had mastered tears), I struck one of the most insolent, and the eldest of them, and hurt him rather seriously. The parents heard of it, and threatened me with prosecution; the whole neighbourhood was aroused. I had to leave my situation secretly, by night, or the mob would have pelted the felon's son out of the parish.

“I went back to London, bearing another

assumed name ; and tried, as a last resource to save me from starvation, the resource of writing. I served my apprenticeship to literature, as a hack-author of the lowest degree. Knowing I had talents which might be turned to account, I tried to vindicate them by writing an original work. But my experience of the world had made me unfit to dress my thoughts in popular costume : I could only tell bitter truths bitterly ; I exposed licensed hypocrisies too openly ; I saw the vicious side of many respectabilities, and said I saw it—in short, I called things by their right names ; and no publisher would treat with me. So I stuck to my low task-work ; my penny-a-lining in third-class newspapers ; my translating from Frenchmen and Germans, and plagiarising from dead authors, to supply the raw material for bookmongering by more accomplished book-mongers than I. In this life, there was one advan-

tage which compensated for much misery and meanness and bitter, biting disappointment: I could keep my identity securely concealed. Character was of no consequence to me; nobody cared to know who I was, or to inquire what I had been—the gallows-mark was smoothed out at last!

“While I was living thus on the offal of literature, I met with a woman of good birth, and fair fortune, whose sympathies, or whose curiosity I happened to interest. She and her father and mother received me favourably, as a gentleman who had known better days, and an author whom the public had undeservedly neglected. How I managed to gain their confidence and esteem, without alluding to my parentage, it is not worth while to stop to describe. That I did so you will easily imagine, when I tell you that the woman to whom I refer, consented, with her father’s full approval, to become my wife.

“The very day of the marriage was fixed. I believed I had successfully parried all perilous inquiries ; but I was wrong. A relation of the family, whom I had never seen, came to town a short time before the wedding. We disliked each other on our first introduction. He was a clever, resolute man of the world ; and privately inquired about me to much better purpose in a few days, than his family had done in several months. Accident favoured him strangely ; everything was discovered—literally everything—and I was contemptuously dismissed the house. Could a lady of respectability marry a man (no matter how worthy in *her* eyes) whose father had been hanged, whose mother had died in a madhouse, who had lived under assumed names, who had been driven from an excellent country neighbourhood for cruelty to a harmless school-boy ? Impossible !

“ With this event, my long strife and struggle with the world ended. My eyes opened to a new view of life, and the purpose of life. My first aspirations to live up to my birth-right position, in spite of adversity and dishonour ; to make my name sweet enough in men’s nostrils to cleanse away the infamy on my father’s, were now no more. The ambition which—whether I was a hack-author, a travelling portrait-painter, or an usher at a school had once whispered to me :—low down as you are in dark, miry ways, you are on the path which leads upwards to high places in the sunshine afar-off ; you are not working to scrape together wealth for another man ; you are independent, self-reliant, labouring in your own cause—the daring ambition which had once counselled thus, sank dead within me at last. The strong, stern spirit was

beaten by spirits stronger and sterner yet—
Infamy and Want.

“ I wrote to a man of character and wealth ; one of my friends of early days, who had ceased to hold communication with me, like other friends ; but, unlike them, had given me up in genuine sorrow : I wrote, and asked him to meet me privately by night. I was too ragged to go to his house ; too sensitive still (even if I had gone and had been admitted) to risk encountering people there, who either knew my father, or knew how he had died. I wished to speak to my former friend, unseen ; and made the appointment accordingly. He kept it.

“ When we met, I said to him :—I have a last favour to ask of you. When we parted years ago, I had high hopes and brave resolutions : both are worn out. I then believed that I could not only rise superior to my misfortune, but could make

that very misfortune the motive of my rise. You told me I was too quick of temper, too morbidly sensitive about the slightest reference to my father's death, too fierce and changeable under undeserved trial and disappointment. This might have been true then ; but I am altered now : pride and ambition have been persecuted and starved out of me. An obscure, monotonous life, in which thought and spirit may be laid asleep, never to wake again, is the only life I care for. Help me to lead it. I ask you first, as a beggar, to give me from your superfluity, apparel decent enough to bear the daylight. I ask you next, to help me to some occupation which will just give me my bread, my shelter, and my hour or two of solitude in the evening. You have plenty of influence to do this, and you know I am honest. You cannot choose me too humble and ob-

scure an employment; let me descend low enough to be lost to sight beneath the world I have lived in; let me go among people who want to know that I work honestly for them, and want to know nothing more—get me a mean hiding-place to conceal myself and my history in for ever, and then neither attempt to see me or communicate with me again. If former friends chance to ask after me, tell them I am dead, or gone into another country. The wisest life, is the life the animals lead: I want, like them, to serve my master for food, shelter, and liberty to lie asleep now and then in the sunshine, without being driven away as a pest, or a trespasser. Do you believe in this resolution?—it is my last.

“He *did* believe in it; and he granted what I asked. Through his interference and recommendation, I entered the service of Mr. Sherwin.—

“I must stop here for to-day. To-morrow I shall come to disclosures of vital interest to you. Have you been surprised that I, your enemy by every cause of enmity that one man can have against another, should write to you so fully about the secrets of my early life? I have done so, because I wish the strife between us to be an open strife on *my* side; because I desire that you should know thoroughly what you have to expect from my character, after such a life as I have led. There was purpose in my deceit, when I deceived you—there is purpose in my frankness, when I now tell you all.”

“I began in Mr. Sherwin’s employment, as the lowest clerk in his office. Both the master and the men looked a little suspiciously on me, at first. My account of myself was always the same—simple and

credible ; I had entered the counting-house with the best possible recommendation, and I acted up to it. These circumstances in my favour, joined to a manner that never varied, and to a steadiness at my work that never relaxed, soon produced their effect—all curiosity about me gradually died away : I was left to pursue my avocations in peace. The friend who had got me my situation, preserved my secret as I had desired him ; of all the people whom I had formerly known, pitiless enemies and lukewarm adherents, not one ever suspected that my hiding-place was the back office of a linen-draper's shop. For the first time in my life, I felt that the secret of my father's misfortune was mine, and mine only ; that my security from exposure was at length complete.

“ Before long, I rose to the chief place in the counting-house. It was no very difficult

matter for me to discover, that my new master's character had other elements besides that of the highest respectability. In plain terms, I found him to be a pretty equal compound by nature, of the fool, the tyrant, and the coward. There was only one direction in which what grovelling sympathies he had, could be touched to some purpose. Save him waste, or get him profit; and he was really grateful. I succeeded in working both these marvels. His managing man cheated him; I found it out; refused to be bribed to collusion; and exposed the fraud to Mr. Sherwin. This got me his confidence, and the place of chief clerk. In that position, I discovered a means, which had never occurred to my employer, of greatly enlarging his business and its profits, with the least possible risk. He tried my plan, and it succeeded. This gained me his warmest admiration, an increase of salary,

and a firm footing in his family circle. My projects were more than fulfilled: I had money enough, and leisure enough; and spent my obscure existence exactly as I had proposed.

“But my life was still not destined to be altogether devoid of an animating purpose. When I first knew Margaret Sherwin, she was just changing from childhood to girlhood. I marked the promise of future beauty in her face and figure; and secretly formed the resolution which you afterwards came forward to thwart, but which I have executed, and will execute, in spite of you.

“The thoughts out of which that resolution sprang, counselled me more calmly than you can suppose. I said within myself: ‘The best years of my life have been irrevocably wasted; misery and humiliation and disaster have followed my steps from my

youth; of all the pleasant draughts which other men drink to sweeten existence, not one has passed my lips. Half of my life is well nigh over; and I have but just possessed myself of the poor, negative advantage of mere ease and tranquillity. I will know happiness besides; and this girl shall confer it. She shall grow up to maturity for *me*: I will imperceptibly gain such a hold on her affections, while they are yet young and impressible; I will, patiently and privately, so associate myself with her first thoughts, with her dearest occupations, with all her little interests and sympathies and innocent hopes and fears, that, when the time comes, and I speak the word—though my years more than double her's, though I am dependant on her father for the bread I eat, though parents' voice and lover's voice unite to call her back—she shall still come

to my side, and of her own free will put her hand in mine, and follow me wherever I go : my wife, my mistress, my servant, which I choose. The heavy frown of the world has scowled on me, and clouded my youth—the light of love and beauty shall shine out, and sun me in my age.

“ This was my secret project. To execute it, time and opportunity were mine ; and I steadily and warily made use of them, hour by hour, day by day, year by year. From first to last, the girl’s father never suspected me. Besides the security which he felt in my age, he had judged me by his own small commercial standard, and had found me a model of integrity. A man who had saved him from being cheated ; who had so enlarged and consolidated his business as to place him among the top dignitaries of the trade ; who was the first to come to the desk in

the morning, and the last to remain there in the evening; who had not only never demanded, but had absolutely refused to take, a single holyday—such a man as this was, morally and intellectually, a man in ten thousand; a man to be admired and trusted in every relation of life !

“ His confidence in me knew no bounds. He was uneasy if I was not by to advise him in the simplest matters. My ears were the first to which he confided his insane ambition on the subject of his daughter—his anxiety to see her marry above her station—his stupid resolution to give her the false, flippant, fashionable education which she subsequently received. I thwarted his plans in nothing, openly—counteracted them in everything, secretly. The more I strengthened my sources of influence over Margaret, the more pleased he was. He was delighted to hear her con-

stantly referring to me about her home-lessons ; to see her coming to me, evening after evening, to learn new occupations and amusements. He suspected I had been a gentleman ; he had been told I spoke pure English ; he felt sure I had received a first-rate education—I was as good for Margaret as good society itself !

“ It was better still when I was accommodating enough to take the little girl out walking in the long summer evenings, after business hours. Servants were always careless ; Mrs. Sherwin was always ill ; Mr. Sherwin liked his bottle of port and his nap after dinner, and his glass of gin and water, and cigar in the garden, after that—nobody in the house was so willing and so competent to take care of Margaret as I was. When she grew older and went to the fashionable school, as her father had declared she should, my offer to keep up

her lessons in the holydays, and to examine what progress she had made, when she came home regularly every fortnight for the Sunday, was accepted with greedy readiness, and acknowledged with servile gratitude. At this time, Mr. Sherwin's own estimate of me, among his friends, was, that he had got me for half nothing, and that I was worth more to him than a thousand a-year.

“But there was one member of the family who suspected my intentions from the first. Mrs. Sherwin—the weak, timid, sickly woman, whose life was a life of constant oppression and restraint, whose opinion nobody regarded, whose character nobody understood—Mrs. Sherwin, of all those who dwelt in the house or came to the house, was the only one, whose looks, words, and manner, kept me constantly on my guard; and, sometimes, even filled me

with apprehensions of discovery and defeat. The very first time we saw each other, that woman doubted *me*, as I doubted *her*; and for ever afterwards, when we met, she was on the watch. This mutual distrust, this antagonism of our two natures, never openly proclaimed itself, and never wore away. My chance of security lay, not so much in my own caution, and my perfect command of look and action under all emergencies, as in the self-distrust and timidity of her nature; in the helpless inferiority of position to which her husband's want of affection, and her daughter's want of respect condemned her in her own house; and in the influence of repulsion—at times, even of absolute terror—which my presence had the power of communicating to her. Suspecting what I am assured she suspected—incapable as she was of rendering her suspicions certainties

—knowing beforehand, as she must have known, that no words she could speak would gain the smallest respect or credit from her husband or her child—that woman's life, while I was at North Villa, must have been a life of the direst mental suffering to which any human being was ever condemned.

“As time passed, and Margaret grew older, her beauty, both of face and form, approached nearer to perfection than I had foreseen, closely as I had watched her. But neither her mind nor her disposition kept pace with her beauty. This did not surprise me: while she was little better than a child I had doubted her character; and I now found all my doubts confirmed. Few, if any, of her faults escaped me; it was not in my age and not in my purpose to let her personal beauty blind me to her mental defects and moral deformities.

I studied her closely, with the same patient, penetrating observation, which my experience of the world has made it a habit with me to direct on every one with whom I am brought in contact—I studied her, I say, intently: and found her worthy of nothing, not even of the slave-destiny which I had in store for her.

“She had neither heart nor mind, in the higher sense of those words. She had simply instincts—most of the bad instincts of an animal; none of the good. The great motive power which really directed her, was Deceit. I never met with any human being so inherently disingenuous, so naturally incapable of candour even in the most trifling affairs of life, as she was. The best training could never have wholly overcome this vice in her: the education she actually got—an education under false pretences—encouraged it. Every

body has read, some people have known, of young girls who have committed the most extraordinary impostures, or sustained the most infamous false accusations; their chief motive being often the sheer enjoyment of practising deceit. Of such characters was the character of Margaret Sherwin.

“She had strong passions, but not their frequent accompaniment—strong will, and strong intellect. She had some obstinacy, but no firmness. Appeal in the right way to her vanity, and you could make her do the thing she had declared she would not do, the minute after she had made the declaration. As for her mind, it was of the lowest school-girl average. She had a certain knack at learning this thing, and remembering that; but she understood nothing fairly, felt nothing deeply. If I had not had my own motive in teaching her, I should have shut the

books again, the first time she and I opened them together, and have given her up as a fool.

“ All, however, that I discovered of bad in her character, never made me pause in the prosecution of my design : I had carried it too far for that, before I thoroughly knew her. Besides, what mattered her duplicity to *me* ?—I could see through it. Her strong passions ?—I could control them. Her obstinacy ?—I could break it. Her poverty of intellect ?—I cared nothing about her intellect. What I wanted was youth and beauty : she was young and beautiful, and I was sure of her.

“ Yes : sure. Her showy person, showy accomplishments, and showy manners dazzled all eyes but mine—of all the people about her, I alone found out what she really was ; and in that lay the main secret of my influence over her. I dreaded no rivalry.

Her father, prompted by his ambitious hopes, kept most young men of her class away from the house : the few who did come were not dangerous ; *they* were as incapable of inspiring, as *she* was of feeling, real love. Her mother still watched me, and still discovered nothing : still suspected me behind my back, and still trembled before my face. Months passed on monotonously, year succeeded to year ; and I bided my time as patiently, and kept my secret as cautiously as at the first. No change occurred, nothing happened to weaken or alter my influence at North Villa, until the day arrived when Margaret left school and came home for good.

“Exactly at the period to which I have referred, certain business transactions of great importance required the presence of Mr. Sherwin, or of some confidential person to

represent him, at Lyons. Secretly distrusting his own capabilities, he proposed to me to go; saying that it would be a pleasant trip for me, and a good introduction to his wealthy manufacturing correspondents. After some consideration, I accepted his offer.

“I had never hinted a word of my intentions towards her to Margaret; but she understood them well enough—I was certain of that, from many indications which no man could mistake. For reasons which will presently appear, I resolved not to explain myself until my return from Lyons. My private object in going there, was to make interest secretly with Mr. Sherwin’s correspondents for a situation in their house. I knew that when I made my proposals to Margaret, I must be prepared to act on them on the instant; I knew that her father’s fury when he discovered that I had been helping to educate his daughter only for

myself, would lead him to any extremities ; I knew that we must fly to some foreign country ; and, lastly, I knew the importance of securing a provision for our maintenance, when we got there. I had saved money, it is true—nearly two-thirds of my salary, every year—but had not saved enough for two. Accordingly, I left England to push my own interests, as well as my employer's ; left it, confident that my short absence would not weaken the result of years of steady influence over Margaret. The sequel showed that, cautious and calculating as I was, I had nevertheless overlooked the chances against me, which my own experience of her vanity and duplicity ought to have enabled me thoroughly to foresee.

“ Well : I had been some time at Lyons ; had managed my employer's business (from first to last, I was faithful, as I had engaged to be, to his commercial interests) ; and had

arranged my own affairs securely and privately. Already, I was looking forward, with sensations of happiness which were new to me, to my return and to the achievement of the one success, the solitary triumph of my long life of humiliation and disaster, when a letter arrived from Mr. Sherwin. It contained the news of your private marriage, and of the extraordinary conditions that had been attached to it with your consent.

“ Other people were in the room with me, when I read that letter ; but my manner betrayed nothing to them. My hand never trembled, when I folded the sheet of paper again ; I was not a minute late in attending a business engagement which I had accepted ; the slightest duties of other kinds which I had to do, I rigidly fulfilled—never did I more thoroughly and fairly earn the evening’s leisure by the morning’s work, than I earned it that day.

“Leaving the town at the close of afternoon, I walked on till I came to a solitary place on the bank of the great river which runs past Lyons. There, I opened the letter for the second time ; and read it through again slowly, with no necessity now for self-control, because no human being was near to look at me. There, I read your name, constantly repeated in every line of writing ; and knew that the man who, in my absence, had stepped between me and my prize—the man who, in his insolence of youth, and birth, and fortune, had snatched from me the one, long-delayed reward for twenty years of misery, just as my hands were stretched forth to grasp it—was the son of that honourable and high-born gentleman who had given my father to the gallows, and had made me the outcast of my social privileges for life.

“The sun was setting when I looked

up from the letter ; flashes of rose-light leapt on the leaping river ; the birds were winging nestward to the distant trees, and the ghostly stillness of night was sailing solemnly over earth and sky, as the first thought of the vengeance I would have on father and son began to burn fiercely at my heart, to move like a new life within me, to whisper to my spirit :—Wait : be patient ; they are both in your power ; you can now foul the father's name as the father fouled your's—you can yet thwart the son, as the son has thwarted *you*.

“In the few minutes that passed, while I lingered in that lonely place after reading the letter, I imagined the whole scheme which it afterwards took a year to execute—I laid the whole plan against you and your father, the first half of which, through the accident that led you to your discovery, has alone been carried out. I believed

then, as I believe now, that I stood towards you both in the place of an injured man, whose right it was, in self-defence and self-assertion, to injure you. Judged by your ideas, this may read wickedly; but to me, after having lived and suffered as I have, the moral common-places current in the world are so many brazen images, which society impudently worships—like the Jews of old—in the face of living Truth.

“Let us get back to England. That evening, when we met for the first time, did you observe that Margaret was unusually agitated before I came in? I detected some change, the moment I saw her. Did you notice that I avoided speaking to her, or looking at her? it was because I was afraid to do so. I saw that with my return, my old influence over her was

coming back ; and I still believe that, hypocritical and heartless though she was, and blinded though you were by your passion for her, she would have unconsciously betrayed everything to you on that evening, if I had not acted as I did. Her mother, too !—how her mother watched me from the moment when I came in !

“ Afterwards, while you were trying to find out what my character really was—acted on, as I consider you to have been, by a foreboding beyond your own recognition ; a foreboding wrought in *your* spirit by the mute prophecy of the future lying hidden in *mine*—while you were striving hard to open, undetected, the sealed history of my early life, I was warily and secretly discovering from Margaret all that I desired to know. I say ‘ warily ;’ but the word poorly expresses my consummate

caution and patience, at that time. I never put myself in her power; never risked offending, or frightening, or revolting her; never lost an opportunity of bringing her back to her old habits of familiarity; and, more than all, never gave her mother a single opportunity of detecting me. This was the sum of what I gathered up, bit by bit, from secret and scattered investigations, persevered in through many weeks:

“Her vanity had been hurt, her expectations disappointed, at my having left her for Lyons, with no other parting words than such as I might have spoken to any woman whom I looked on merely as a friend. That she felt any genuine love for me I never have believed, and never shall—but I had that practical ability, that firmness of will, that obvious personal ascendancy over most of those

with whom I came in contact, which extorts the respect and admiration of women of all characters, and even of women of no character at all. As far as her senses, her instincts, and her pride could take her, I had won her over to me; but no farther—because no farther could she go. I mention pride among her motives, advisedly. She was proud of being the object of such attentions as I had now paid to her for years, because she fancied that, through those attentions, I, who, more or less, ruled everyone else in her sphere, had yielded to her the power of ruling *me*. The manner of my departure from England showed her too plainly that she had miscalculated her influence, and that the power, with her as with others, was all on my side. Hence the wound to her vanity, to which I have alluded.

“It was while this wound was still fresh that you met her, and appealed to her vanity in a new direction. You must have seen clearly enough, that such proposals as your’s far exceeded the most ambitious expectations formed by her father. No man’s alliance could have lifted her much higher out of her own class than your’s: she knew this, and from that knowledge married you—married you for your station, for your name, for your great friends and connections, for your father’s money, and carriages, and fine houses; for everything, in short, but yourself.

“Still, in spite of the temptations of youth, wealth, and birth which your proposals held out to her, she accepted them at first (I made her confess it herself) with a secret terror and misgiving produced by the remembrance of me.

These sensations, however, she soon quelled, or fancied she quelled—and these, it was now my last, best chance to revive. I had a whole year for the work before me; and I felt certain of success.

“On your side, you had immense advantages. You had social superiority; you had her father’s full approbation; and you were married to her. If she had loved you for yourself, loved you for anything besides her own sensual interests, her vulgar ambition, her reckless vanity, every effort I could have made against you would have been defeated from the first. But, setting this out of the question, in spite of the utter heartlessness of her attachment to you, if you had not consented to that condition of waiting a year for her after marriage; or, consenting to it, if you had broken it long before the year was out—knowing, as you should have known, that in most women’s eyes a man

is not dishonoured by breaking his promise, so long as he only breaks it for a woman's sake—if, I say, you had taken either of these courses, I should still have been powerless against you. But you remained faithful to your promise, faithful to the condition, faithful to the ill-directed modesty of your love; and that very fidelity put you in my power. A pure-minded girl would have loved you a thousand times better for acting as you did—but Margaret Sherwin was not a pure-minded girl, not a maidenly girl: I have looked into her thoughts, and I know it. She was fit to be any man's mistress—no man's wife.

“Such were your chances against me; and such was the manner in which you misused them. On *my* side, I had indefatigable patience; immovable will; personal advantages equal, with the exception of birth and age, to your's; long-established

influence ; freedom to be familiar ; and, more than all, that stealthy, unflagging strength of purpose which only springs from the desire of revenge. I first thoroughly tested your character, and discovered on what points it was necessary for me to be on my guard against you, when you took shelter under my roof from the storm. If your father had been with you on that night, there were moments, while the tempest was wrought to its full fury, when, if my voice could have called the thunder down on the house to crush it and every one in it to atoms, I would have spoken the word, and ended the strife for all of us. The wind, the hail, and the lightning maddened my thoughts of your father and you—I was nearly letting you see it, when that flash came between us as we parted at my door.

“ How I gained your confidence, you

know ; and you know also, how I contrived to make you use me, afterwards, as the secret friend who procured you privileges with Margaret which her father would not grant at your own request. This, at the outset, secured me from suspicions on your part ; and I had only to leave it to your infatuation to do the rest. With you, my course was easy—with her, it was beset by difficulties ; but I overcame them. In what manner, it little concerns you to know, after all that has happened. Your fatal consent to wait through a year of probation, furnished me with weapons against you, which I employed to the most unscrupulous purpose. I can picture to myself what would be your indignation and your horror, if I fully described the use which I made of the position in which your ill-advised compliance with her father's conditions placed you towards Margaret. I spare

you this avowal—it would be useless now. Consider me what you please ; denounce my conduct in any terms you like : my justification will always be the same. I was the injured man ; you were the aggressor ; I was righting myself by getting back a possession of which you had robbed me, and any means were sanctified by such an end as that.

“Is this the sophistry of crime ? It may be so, in your estimation. *You* may still be able to detect the hairsbreadth line which separates good from evil, in the moral plan of our modern civilisation—I have ceased to see it : ceased for ever. Do you wonder how it has been blotted out from my eyes ? Look back at the meagre outline of my life in these pages ; pause ; think ; trace boldly the intricate and inevitable relations of cause and effect in the moral, as in the physical world—you will wonder no longer.

“I tell you again, I made Margaret secretly despise you. But my success, so far, was of little avail, in itself, against the all-powerful counter-attraction which you possessed. Contemptible, or not, you had still this superiority over me—you could make a fine lady of her. From that fact sprang the ambition which all my influence, dating as it did from her childhood, could not destroy. There, was fastened the main-spring which regulated her selfish devotion to you, and which it was next to impossible to snap asunder. I never made the attempt.

“The scheme which I proposed to her, when she was fully prepared to hear it, and to conceal that she had heard it, left her free to enjoy all the social advantages which your alliance could bestow—free to ride in her carriage, and go into her father’s shop (that was one of her ambitions!) as a new

customer added to his aristocratic connection—free even to become one of your family, unsuspected, in case your rash marriage was forgiven. Your credulity rendered the execution of this scheme easy. In what manner it was to be carried out, and what object I proposed to myself in framing it, I abstain from avowing; for the simple reason that the discovery at which you arrived by following us on the night of the party, made my plan abortive, and has obliged me since to renounce it. I need only say, in this place, that it threatened your father as well as you, and that Margaret recoiled from it at first—not from any horror of the proposal, but through fear of discovery. Gradually, I overcame her apprehensions: very gradually, for I was not thoroughly secure of her devotion to my purpose, until your year of probation was nearly out.

“Through all that year, daily visitor as

you were at North Villa, you never suspected either of us! And yet, had you been one whit less infatuated by your passion for Margaret; had you been once able to turn away your eyes from the beauty which was fascinating you to your ruin, and to look down, ever so superficially, into the hypocrite heart beneath, how many warnings you might have discovered, which, in spite of her duplicity and my caution, would then have shown themselves plainly enough to put you on your guard! Those abrupt changes in her manner, those alternate fits of peevish silence and capricious gaiety which sometimes displayed themselves even in your presence, had every one of them their sinister and perilous meaning—though you could not discern it. Sometimes, they meant fear of discovery; sometimes, fear of me: now, they might be traced back to hidden contempt; now, to passions swelling under fancied outrage; now, to secret remem-

brance of disclosures I had just made, or eager anticipation of disclosures I had yet to reveal. There were times at which every step of the way along which I was advancing was marked, faintly yet significantly, in her manner and her speech, could you only have interpreted them aright. My first renewal of my old influence over her, my first words that degraded you in her eyes, my first successful pleading of my own cause against your's, my first appeal to those passions in her which I knew how to move, my first proposal to her of the whole scheme which I had matured in solitude, in the foreign country, by the banks of the great river—all these separate and gradual advances on my part towards the end which I was vowed to achieve, were outwardly shadowed forth in her, consummate as were her capacities for deceit, and consummately as she learnt to use them against you.

“Do you remember noticing, on your re-

turn from the country, how ill Margaret looked, and how ill I looked? We had some interviews during your absence, at which I spoke such words to her as would have left their mark on the face of a Jezebel, or a Messalina. Have you forgotten how often, during the latter days of your year of expectation, I abruptly left the room after you had called me in to bear you company in your evening readings? My pretext was sudden illness; and illness it was, but not of the body. As the time approached for the consummation of my success and of your defeat, I felt less and less secure of my own caution and patience. With you, indeed, I might still have considered myself safe: it was the presence of Mrs. Sherwin that drove me from the room. Under that woman's fatal eye I shrank, when the last days drew near—I, who had defied her detection, and stood firmly on my guard against her sleep-

less, silent, deadly vigilance, for months and months, gave way as the end approached ! I knew that she had once or twice spoken strangely to you ; and I dreaded lest her wandering, incoherent words might yet take in time a recognisable direction, a palpable shape. They did not : the instinct of terror bound her tongue to the last. Perhaps, even if she had spoken plainly you would not have believed her ; you would have been still true to yourself and to your confidence in Margaret. Enemy as I am to you, enemy as I will be to the day of your death, I will do you justice for the past :—Your love for that girl, was a love which even the purest and best of women could never have thoroughly deserved.

“ My letter is nearly done : my retrospect is finished. I have brought it down to the date of events, about which you know as

much as I do. Accident conducted you to a discovery which, otherwise, you might not have made, perhaps for months; perhaps not at all, until I had led you to it of my own accord. I say accident, positively; knowing that from first to last I trusted no third person. All my secret interviews with Margaret, either before or after your daily visits to her father's house, were arranged without any intermediary. All the signs which we privately agreed should pass between us, when you were present, were arranged and communicated by word of mouth; and were never trusted on paper. What you know, you knew by accident alone.

“ But for that chance discovery, you would have seen me bring her back to North Villa at the appointed time, in my care, just as she went out. I had no dread of her meeting you. She had been guilty

in thought and in purpose so long, that she was fit to be guilty in act without a chance of betraying herself. But enough of her! I shall dispose of her future, as I had resolved to dispose of it years ago; careless how she may be affected when she first sees the hideous alteration which your attack has wrought in me. Enough, I say, of the Sherwins—father, mother, and daughter—your destiny lies not with *them*, but with *me*.

“Yes: with *me*. I have made good my prior right to Margaret, as I purposed; and there—as far as you were concerned—my retaliation might once have ended. It has, now, only begun. Remember the work of your own hands, that night, where the sharp granite lay over the road! Do you still exult in having deformed me in every feature, in having given me a face to revolt every human being who looks on

me? Do you triumph in the remembrance of this atrocity, as you triumphed in the acting of it—believing that you had destroyed my future with Margaret, in destroying my very identity as a man? I tell you, that with the hour when I leave this hospital your day of triumph will be over, and your day of expiation will begin—never to end till the death of one of us. You shall live—refined, educated gentleman as you are—to wish, like a ruffian, that you had killed me; and your father shall live to wish it too.

“Am I trying to awe you with the fierce words of a boaster and a bully? Test me, by looking back a little, and discovering what I have abstained from for the sake of my purpose, since I have been here. A word or two from my lips, in answer to the questions with which I have been baited, day after day, by those

about me, would have called you before a magistrate to answer for an assault—a shocking and a savage assault, even in this country, where hand to hand brutality is a marketable commodity between the Prisoner and the Law. Your father's name might have been publicly coupled with your dishonour, if I had but spoken; and I was silent. I kept the secret—kept it, because to avenge myself on you by a paltry scandal, which you and your family (opposing to it wealth, position, previous character, and general sympathy) would live down in a few days, was not *my* revenge: because to be righted before magistrates and judges by a beggarman's exhibition of physical injury, and a coward's confession of physical defeat, was not *my* way of righting myself. I have a life-long retaliation in view, which laws and lawgivers are powerless either to aid or to oppose—some-

thing like that first tremendous retaliation which set the mark upon Cain (as I will set a mark on you), and then made his life his punishment (as I will make your life your's).

“How? Remember what my career has been; and know that I will make your career like it. As my father's death by the hangman affected *my* existence, so the events of that night when you followed me shall affect *your's*. Your father shall see you living the life to which his evidence against *my* father condemned *me*—shall see the foul stain of your disaster clinging to you wherever you go, an infection never to be hidden, never to be purified away. The infamy with which I am determined to pursue you, shall be an infamy that cannot be lived down: it shall be your own infamy that you cannot get quit of—for you shall never get quit of me, never get

quit of the wife who has dishonoured you. You may leave your home, and leave England; you may make new friends, and seek new employments; years and years may pass away—and still, you shall not escape us: still, you shall never know when we are near, or when we are distant; when we are ready to appear before you, or when we are sure to keep out of your sight. My deformed face, and her fatal beauty—though I drag her with me dying on your track—shall hunt you through the world. The terrible secret of your dishonour, and of the atrocity by which you avenged it, shall ooze out through strange channels, in vague shapes, by tortuous intangible processes; ever changing in the manner of its exposure, never remediable by your own resistance, and always directed to the same end:—your isolation as a marked man (marked for ridicule, for pity, or for

execration, I care not which) in every fresh sphere, among every new community to which you retreat.

“Do you call this a very madness of malignity and revenge? It is the only occupation in life for which your mutilation of me has left me fit; and I accept it, as work worthy of my deformity. In the prospect of linking you to your own infamy, wherever you go; as my father, for instance, had his life been spared, might have been linked, as a gentleman-felon, to a felon-companion from the filthiest dregs of the people—in the prospect of tracking you from place to place, avoiding you when you look for me, appearing before you when you think me lost, speaking against you when you believe I am silenced, silent when you are prepared for me to speak—in the prospect of watching how you bear this hunting through life, that never quite hunts

you down ; how long you resist the poison influence, as slow as it is sure, of a crafty tongue that cannot be silenced, of a denouncing presence that cannot be fled, of a damning secret torn from you and exposed afresh each time you have hidden it—in such prospects as these, and in such a future as they disclose, there is the promise of a nameless delight which it sometimes fevers, sometimes chills my blood to think of. Lying in this place at night, in those hours of darkness and stillness when the surrounding atmosphere of human misery presses heavy on me in my heavy sleep, prophecies of dread things to come between us, trouble my spirit in dreams. At those times, I know, and shudder in knowing, that there is something besides the motive of retaliation, something less earthly and apparent than that, which urges me horribly and supernaturally to link myself to you for

life ; which makes me feel as the bearer of a curse that shall follow you ; as the instrument of a fatality pronounced against you long ere we met—a fatality beginning before our fathers were parted by the hangman ; perpetuating itself in you and me ; ending who shall say how, or when ?

“ Beware of comforting yourself with a false security, by despising my words, as the wild words of a madman, dreaming of the perpetration of impossible crimes. Beware of conveniently questioning my sanity, as the hospital-doctors have questioned it already—the men of purblind science, whose divining-rod for every mystery of life is the anatomical scalpel ; who, not hearing me speak as other men in my place would speak, think to find the reason in a wound they are curing in my head ! Throughout this letter I have warned you of what you may expect ; because I will not assail you at disadvantage,

as you assailed me ; because it is my pleasure to ruin you, openly resisting me at every step, I have given you fair play, as the huntsmen give fair play at starting to the animal they are about to run down. Be warned, therefore, against seeking a false hope in the belief that my faculties are shaken, and that my resolves are visionary—false, because such a hope is only despair in disguise.

“And now, throw this letter from you as contemptuously as you please—tear it up, burn it : you will not tear what I have written from your memory, you will not burn my words out of your heart. The time is not far distant when those words will become deeds. They cure fast in a public hospital—we shall meet soon !

“ROBERT MANNION.”

Throw the letter from me ? Burn it ? No !

This was not a letter to destroy : not a letter to be read over once, and then to be cast aside and forgotten.

“ We shall meet soon !”

How ? Where ? I looked back at the last page of writing, to examine anew the dark, mysterious denunciations, the monstrous threats of monstrous revenge, which it contained. But my attention wandered strangely ; I confused one paragraph with another ; the longer I read, the less I was able to grasp the meaning, not of sentences merely, but even of the simplest words.

From the first lines to the last, the letter had produced no distinct impressions on my mind : it had only inspired me with vague sensations of unvarying horror and disgust. So utterly was I worn out, heart and mind, by the previous events of the day, so completely were all my faculties overpowered by the same sense of weary helplessness, that

even those earlier portions of Mannion's confession, which revealed the connection between my father and his, and the terrible manner of their separation, hardly roused me to more than a momentary astonishment. I just called to remembrance that I had never heard the subject mentioned at home, except once or twice in vague hints dropped mysteriously by an old servant, and little regarded by me at the time, as referring to matters which had happened before I was born. I just reflected thus briefly and languidly on the narrative at the commencement of the letter; and then mechanically proceeded to read on. The same dullness of sensation still oppressed me: except the passages which contained the exposure of Margaret's real character, and those which described the origin and progress of Mannion's infamous plot, nothing in the letter impressed me, as I was afterwards destined to be im-

pressed by it on a second reading. The lethargy of all feeling into which I had now sunk, seemed a very lethargy of death.

I tried to clear and concentrate my faculties by thinking of other subjects ; but without success. All that I had heard and seen since the morning, now recurred to me more and more vaguely and confusedly. My father's last words when I left him for ever, mingled unnaturally with the gross words of Mr. Sherwin, with the dying words of his wife, and even with certain expressions in Mannion's letter, which my memory involuntarily preserved. I could form no plan either for the present or the future. I knew as little how to meet Mr. Sherwin's last threat of forcing me to acknowledge his guilty daughter, as how to defend myself against the life-long hostility with which I was menaced by Mannion. At last, my own sense of the confusion in my mind, of the

utter forlornness of my situation, of the terrible necessities which urged me to instant action, and of my present miserable incapacity to rise equal to them, began to affect my imagination very strangely. A feeling of awe and apprehension, which I could trace to no distinct cause, stole irresistibly and mysteriously over me. A horror of the searching brightness of daylight, a suspicion of the loneliness of the place to which I had retreated, a yearning to be among my fellow-creatures again, to live where there was life—the busy life of London—overcame me. I turned hastily, and walked back from the suburbs to the great city; distrusting all solitude, I knew not why; seeking out the noisiest and most crowded streets, yet with what purpose I could not tell.

It was growing towards evening as I gained one of the great thoroughfares. Seeing some of the inhabitants of the houses,

as I walked along, sitting at their open windows to enjoy the evening air, the thought came to me for the first time that day:—where shall I lay my head to-night? Home I had none. Friends who would have gladly received me were not wanting; but to go to them would oblige me to explain myself, to disclose something of the secret of my calamity: and this I was determined to keep strictly, as I had told my father I would keep it. My one, last-left consolation was my knowledge of still preserving that resolution, of still sternly and honourably holding by it at all hazards, cost what it might

So I thought no more of succour or sympathy from any one of my friends. As a stranger I had been driven from my home, and as a stranger I was resigned to live, until I had learnt how to conquer my misfortune by my own vigour and endurance. Firm in this determination, though firm in

nothing else, I now looked around me for the first shelter I could purchase from strangers—the humbler the better.

I happened to be in the poorest part, and on the poorest side of the great street along which I was walking—among the inferior shops, and the houses of few stories. A room to let was not hard to find here. I took the first I saw ; escaped questions about names and references by paying my week's rent in advance ; and then found myself left in possession of the one little room which I must be resigned to look on for the future—perhaps for a long future !—as my home.

Home ! A dear and a mournful remembrance was revived in the reflections suggested by that one simple word. Through my weary and troubled thoughts ; through my gloomiest forebodings of persecution that might come with the morrow, and of peril

that lay hidden in the future ; through all the darkness that thickened and thickened yet over my mind, there now passed one faint ray of light which gave promise of the morning—the light of the calm, hushed face that I had last looked on when it was resting on my father's breast.

Clara ! My parting words to her, when I had unclasped from my neck those kind arms which would fain have held me to home for ever, had expressed a promise that was yet unfulfilled. I trembled as I now thought on my sister's situation. Not knowing whither I had turned my steps on leaving home ; uncertain to what extremities my despair might hurry me ; absolutely ignorant even whether she might ever see me again—it was terrible to reflect on the suspense under which she might be suffering, at this very moment, on my account. My promise to write to her, was of all promises the

most vitally important, and the first that should be fulfilled.

My letter was very short. I communicated to her the address of the house in which I was living (well knowing that nothing but positive information on this point would effectually relieve her anxiety)—I asked her to write in reply, and let me hear some news of her, the best that she could give—and I entreated her to believe implicitly in my patience and courage under every disaster; and to feel assured that, whatever happened, I should never lose the hope of soon meeting her again. Of the perils that beset me, of the wrong and injury I might yet be condemned to endure, I said nothing. Those were truths which I was determined to conceal from her, to the last. She had suffered for me more than I dared think of, already!

I sent my letter by hand, so as to ensure

its immediate delivery. In writing those few simple lines, I had no suspicion of the important results which they were destined to produce. In thinking of to-morrow, and of all the events which to-morrow might bring with it, I little thought of what was really to come with the morning; I little imagined, throughout the long and wakeful night, whose voice would be the first to greet me the next day, whose hand would be held out to me as the helping hand of a friend.

II.

IT was still early in the morning, when a loud knock sounded at the house-door, and I heard the landlady calling to the servant : “ A gentleman to see the gentleman who came in last night.” The moment the words reached me, my thoughts recurred to the letter of yesterday—Had Mannion found me out in my retreat ? As the suspicion crossed my mind, the door opened, and the visitor entered.

I looked at him in speechless astonish-

ment. It was my eldest brother ! It was Ralph himself who now walked into the room !

“ Well, Basil ! how are you ? ” he said, with his old off-hand manner and hearty voice.

“ Ralph ! *You* in England !—*you* here ! ”

“ Came back from Italy last night. The fact is—Basil, how awfully you’re changed ! I hardly know you again.”

His manner altered completely as he spoke the last words. The look of real sorrow and alarm which he fixed on me, went to my heart. I thought of holyday-time, when we were boys ; of Ralph’s boisterous, reckless ways with me ; of his good-humoured school-frolics, at my expense ; of the strong bond of union between us, so strangely compounded of my weakness, and his strength, of my passive and of his active nature : I saw how little *he* had changed since that time, and knew, as I never knew before, how miserably *I*

was altered. All the shame and grief of my banishment from home came back on me, at sight of his friendly, familiar face. I struggled hard to keep my self-possession, and tried to bid him welcome cheerfully; but the effort was too much for me. I turned away my head, as I took his hand; for the old school-boy feeling of not letting hearty, happy Ralph see that I was in tears, influenced me still.

“Why, Basil! Basil! what are you about? This won’t do. I know the scrape you’re in, young one. It’s bad enough; but not worth breaking your heart about. Damn the scrape, and the woman too! Clara was right (as she always is, by the bye) in sending me here. I’ve promised her to pull you through this wretched mess; and I’ll do it. Get a chair, and listen to me. I’m going to sit on your bed, smoke a cigar, and have a long talk with you.”

While he was lighting his cigar, I looked

more closely at him than before. Though he was the same as ever in manner; though his expression still preserved its reckless, imperturbable levity of former days, I now detected that he had changed a little in some other respects. His features had become coarser—dissipation had begun to mark them; his spare, active, muscular figure had filled out; he was dressed rather carelessly; and of all his trinkets and chains of early times, not one appeared about him now. Ralph looked prematurely middle-aged, since I had seen him last.

“Well,” he began, “first of all, about my coming back. You see, Basil, *Madame*—you know who I mean—” (he referred to his last mistress) “*Madame* wanted to see England, and I was sick of being abroad: so I brought her back with me; and we’re going to live quietly, somewhere in the Brompton neighbourhood. The fact

is, that woman's been my salvation—you must come and see her; she's broke me of gaming altogether; I was going to the devil as fast as I could, when she stopped me—but you know all about it, of course. Well: we got to London yesterday afternoon; and in the evening I left her at the hotel, and went to report myself at home. There, the first thing I heard, was that you had cut me clean out of my old, original distinction of being the family scamp—don't look distressed, Basil; I'm not laughing at you; I've come to do something better than that. Never mind my talk: nothing in the world ever was serious to *me*, and nothing ever will be."

He stopped to knock the ash off his cigar, and settle himself more comfortably on my bed; then proceeded:

"It's been my ill-luck to see my father pretty seriously offended on more than one

occasion ; but I never saw him so very quiet and so very dangerous, so deadly angry and cut-up, as last night when he was telling me about you. I remember well enough how he spoke and looked, when he caught me putting away my trout-flies in the pages of that family history of his ; but it was nothing to see him, or hear him then, to what it is now. I can tell you this, Basil — if I believed in what the poetical people call a broken heart (which I don't), I should be almost afraid that *he* was broken-hearted. He won't get over this infernal scrape of your's (what made you mad enough to marry the girl?), and his turning you out of doors for some time to come. I saw it was no good to say a word for you just yet, so I sat quiet and listened to him till I got my dismissal for the evening—very down in the mouth, you know, at what had happened, and the way he went on about it. I was

positively obliged to ask the butler for a glass of brandy, before I went up-stairs to see Clara, just to get me into my old humour again. And, by George! up-stairs it was worse still. Clara was walking about the room with your letter in her hand—just reach me the matches: my cigar's out. Some men can talk and smoke in equal proportions—I never could."

"You know as well as I do," he continued, when he had relit his cigar, "that Clara is not usually demonstrative. I always thought her rather a cold temperament—lymphatic, as they say in the medical slang. But the moment I put my head in at the door, I found I'd been just as great a fool on that point as on most others. Basil, she positively frightened me: little, simple, quiet, womanly Clara absolutely frightened me! I was not half as much startled when that literary Polish woman,

who dedicated her book against marriage to me, flung a carving-knife at my head because I beat her in a *tête-à-tête* argument at her own table—I was not half as startled then, as I was at the scream Clara gave when she first saw me, and the look in her eyes when she talked about you. I can't describe a bit, myself; and I hate descriptions by other men (most likely on that very account): so I won't describe what she said and did; but I'll just tell you that it ended in my promising to come here the first thing this morning—promising to get you out of the scrape—promising, in short, everything she asked me. So here I am, ready for your business before my own. Madame's at the hotel, half-frantic because I won't go lodging-hunting with her; but Clara's paramount, Clara's the first thought. Somebody must be a good boy at home; and, now you've resigned, I'm

just going to try and succeed you, by way of a change !”

“ Ralph ! Ralph ! can you mention Clara’s name, and that woman’s name, in the same breath ? Did you leave Clara quieter and better ? For God’s sake be serious about that, though serious about nothing else !”

“ Gently, Basil ! *Doucement mon ami !* I *did* leave her quieter : my promise made her look almost like herself again. As for what you say about mentioning Clara and Madame in the same breath, I’ve been talking and smoking till I’ve no second breaths left to devote to second-rate virtue. Confound this cigar ! it’s out again. I must try another. Matches please. There ! Now I’m ready to go on seriously, and find out what’s to be done for poor, dear, innocent, unworldly, old Basil !”

He sat smoking silently for a few mi-

nutes. While he now looked at me, his reckless, boyish levity of manner left him almost entirely; and when he next spoke, there was real energy in his bright eyes, real purpose in his quick, resolute, searching words.

“Now, old fellow,” he resumed, “I don’t want to worry you by raking up this miserable mess again, from beginning to end, in your presence; but I must make sure at the same time that I’ve got hold of the right story, or I can’t be of any use to you. My father was a little obscure on certain points. He talked enough, and ~~more~~ more than enough, about consequences to the family, about his own affliction, about his giving you up for ever; and, in short, about everything but the case itself, as it really stands against us. Now that’s just what I ought to be put up to, and *must* be put up to. You won’t go making

a scene with me, if I tell you in three words what I was told last night, and ask you a question or two about what I want to know this morning—eh?”

“Go on, Ralph: speak as you please — suffering has hardened me to every trial already.”

“Very well. Now, first of all, I understand that you took a fancy to some shop-keeper’s daughter—so far, mind, I don’t blame you: I’ve spent time very pleasantly among the ladies of the counter, myself. But, in the second place, I’m told that you actually married the girl! I don’t wish to be hard upon you, my good fellow, but there was an unparalleled insanity about that act, which couldn’t be matched by all Bedlam. I’m not quite sure whether I understand exactly what virtuous behaviour is; but if *that* was virtuous behaviour—there! there! don’t look

shocked. I suppose the pursuit of Virtue is a long hunt on a dull scent, with a good chance of some awkward spills for eager moral sportsmen. And now, let's have done with the marriage, and get on. Well, you made the girl your wife ; and then innocently consented to a very queer condition of waiting a year for her (virtuous behaviour again, I suppose !) At the end of that time you—don't turn away your head, Basil ! I *may* be a scamp ; but I'm not blackguard enough to make a joke — either in your presence, or out of it—of this part of the story. I'll pass it over altogether, if you like ; and only ask you a question or two. You see my father either could not, or would not speak plainly of the worst part of the business ; and you know him well enough to know why. But somebody must be a little explicit, or I can do nothing. About that man ? You

found the scoundrel out; but did you get within arm's length of him? You did! Speak out, young one! You never let him go when you had him?"

How tenaciously the heart clings to its first habits; through all after-changes and all after-shocks! Despite the humiliation and grief of that moment, as I now told my brother of the struggle with Mannion in the Square, I spoke involuntarily (astonished, and even ashamed, all the while at myself) with something of my old school-day feeling of triumph, when I could claim the rare merit of having succeeded in a feat of strength or activity to the hearty satisfaction of strong and active Ralph!

And he, on his side, heard me almost with his former school-boy delight. He jumped off the bed, and seized both my hands in his strong grasp; his face radiant his eyes sparkling, "Shake hands, old Basil!

Shake hands, as we havn't shaken hands yet—this makes amends for everything! for every infernal mistake you made from the time you first met the girl! One word more though about that fellow—where is he now?"

"In the hospital."

Ralph laughed heartily, and jumped back on the bed. I remembered Mannion's letter, and shuddered as I thought of it.

"The next question is about the girl," said my brother. "What's become of her? Where was she all the time of your illness?"

"At her father's house: she is there still."

"Ah, yes! I see: the old story—inno-cent, of course. And her father backs her, doesn't he? To be sure! that's the old story, too. I've got at our difficulty now: we are threatened with an exposure, if you

don't acknowledge her. Wait a minute ! Have you any evidence against her, besides your own ?”

“ I have a letter, a long letter from her accomplice, containing a confession of his guilt and her's.”

“ She's sure to call that confession a conspiracy. It's of no use to us, unless we dared to go to law—and we daren't: we must hush the thing up at any price; or it will be the death of my father. This is a case for money, just as I thought it would be. Mr. and Miss Shop-keeper have got a large assortment of silence to sell; and we must buy it of them, over the domestic counter, at so much a yard. Have you been there yet, Basil, to ask the price and strike the bargain ?”

“ I was at the house, yesterday.”

“ The deuce you were ! And who did you see ?—The father—eh ? And did you

bring him to terms? did you do business with Mr. Shop-keeper?"

"His manner was brutal: his language, the language of a bully—"

"So much the better. Those men are easiest dealt with: if he will only fly into a passion with *me*, when *I* tackle him, I engage for success beforehand. But the end—how did it end?"

"As it began:—in threats on his part, in endurance on mine."

"Ah! we'll see how he likes *my* endurance next: he'll find it rather a different sort of endurance from your's. By the bye, Master Basil, what money had you to offer him?"

"I made no offer to him then. Circumstances happened which rendered me incapable of thinking of it. I intended to go there again, to-day; and if money would bribe him to silence, and save my family

from sharing the dishonour which has fallen on *me*, to abandon to him the only money I have of my own—the little income left me by our mother.”

“Do you mean to tell me that your only resource is in that wretched trifle, and that you ever really intended to let it go, and start in the world without a rap? Do you mean to say that my father gave you up without making the smallest provision for you, in such a mess as you’ve got into? Hang it! do him justice. He has been hard enough on you, I know; but he can’t have coolly turned you over to ruin in that way.”

“He offered me money, Ralph, at parting; but with such words of contempt and insult that I would have died rather than take it. I told him that, unaided by his purse, I would preserve him, and preserve his family from the infamous consequences of

my calamity—though I sacrificed my own happiness and my own honour for ever in doing it. And I go to-day to make that sacrifice. The loss of the little I have to depend on, is the least part of it. He may not see his injustice in doubting me, till too late ; but he *shall* see it. Though he owns me no longer as a son, he shall see what I can still suffer for the credit of his name !”

“I beg your pardon, Basil ; but this is almost as great an insanity, as the insanity of your marriage. I honour the independence of your principle, my dear fellow ; but, while I am to the fore, I’ll take good care that you don’t ruin yourself gratuitously, for the sake of any principles whatever ! Just listen to me, now. In the first place, remember that what my father said to you, he said in a moment of violent exasperation. You had been trampling the pride of

his life in the mud : no man likes that—my father least of any. And, as for the offer of your poor little morsel of an income to stop these peoples' greedy mouths, it isn't a quarter enough for them. They know our family's a wealthy family ; and they'll make their demand accordingly. Any other sacrifice, even to taking the girl back (though you never could bring yourself to do that !) would be of no earthly use. Nothing but money will do ; money cunningly doled out, under the strongest possible stipulations. Now, I'm just the man to do that, and I've got the money—or, rather, my father has, which comes to the same thing. Write me the fellow's name and address ; there's no time to be lost—I'm off to see him at once !”

“I can't allow you, Ralph, to ask my father for what I would not ask him myself—”

“Give me the name and address, or you’ll sour my excellent temper past all sweetening again. Your obstinacy won’t do with *me*, Master Basil—it didn’t at school, and it won’t now. I shall ask my father for money for myself, and use as much of it as I think proper for your interests. He’ll give me anything I want, now I’ve turned good boy. I don’t owe fifty pounds, since my last debts were paid off—thanks to Madame, who is the most managing woman in the world. By the bye, when you see her, don’t seem surprised at her being older than I am. Oh! this is the address, is it? Hollyoake Square? Where the devil’s that? Never mind: I’ll take a cab, and shift the responsibility of finding the place on the driver. Keep up your spirits; and wait here till I come back. You shall have such news of Mr. Shop-keeper and his daughter as you little expect! *Au revoir*, young one—*au revoir*.”

He left the room as rapidly as he had entered it. The minute afterwards, I remembered that I ought to have warned him of the fatal illness of Mrs. Sherwin. She might be dying — dead for aught I knew — when he reached the house. I ran to the window, to call him back: it was too late. Ralph was gone.

Even if he were admitted at North Villa, would he succeed? I was little capable of estimating the chances. The unexpectedness of his visit; the strange mixture of sympathy and levity in his manner, of worldly wisdom and boyish folly in his conversation, appeared to be still confusing me in his absence, just as they had confused me in his presence. My thoughts imperceptibly wandered away from Ralph, and the mission he had undertaken on my behalf, to a subject which seemed destined for the future, to steal on my attention irresistibly and darkly in all my lonely hours. Already,

the fatality denounced against me in Man-
nion's letter, had begun to act: already,
that terrible confession of past misery and
crime, that monstrous declaration of enmity
which was to last with the lasting of life,
began to exercise its numbing influence on
my faculties, to cast its blighting shadow over
my heart.

I opened the letter again ; and re-read the
threats of conspiracy against me at its con-
clusion. One by one, the fearful questions
now arose in my mind ;—how can I resist,
or how escape the vengeance of this evil
spirit ? how shun the dread deformity of that
face, which is to appear before me in secret ?
how silence that fiend's tongue, or make
harmless the poison which it will pour drop
by drop into my life ? When should I first
look for that avenging presence ?—now ; or
not till months hence ? Where should I
first see it ? in the house ?—or in the

street? At what time would it steal to my side? by night—or by day? Should I show the letter to Ralph?—it would be useless. What would avail any advice or assistance which his honest, uncalculating, reckless courage could give, against an enemy who combined the ferocious vigilance of a savage with the far-sighted iniquity of a civilised man?

As this last thought crossed my mind, I hastily closed the letter; determining (alas! how vainly!) never to open it again. Almost at the same instant, I heard another knock at the house-door. Could Ralph have returned already? Impossible! Besides, the knock was very different from his—it was only just loud enough to be audible where I now sat.

Mannion? But would he come thus? openly, fairly, in the broad daylight, through the populous street?

A light, quick step ascended the stairs—my heart bounded; I started to my feet. It was the same step—yes, the same!—which I used to listen for, and love to hear, in my illness. I ran to the door, and opened it. My instinct had not deceived me: it was my sister!

“Basil!” she exclaimed, before I could speak—“has Ralph been here?”

“Yes, love—yes.”

“Where has he gone? what has he done for you? He promised me—”

“And he has kept his promise nobly, Clara: he is away helping me now.”

“Thank God! thank God!”

She sank breathless into a chair, as she spoke. Oh, the pang of looking at her at that moment, and seeing how she was changed!—seeing the dimness and weariness of the gentle eyes; the fear and the sorrow that had already overshadowed the bright young face!

“I shall be better directly,” she said, guessing from my expression what I then felt—“But, seeing you in this strange place, after what happened yesterday ; and—and having come here so secretly, in terror of my father finding it out—I can’t help feeling your altered position and mine a little painfully at first. But we won’t complain, dear, as long as I can get here sometimes to see you : we will only think of the future now. What a mercy, what a happiness it is that Ralph has come back ! We have always done him injustice ; he is far kinder and far better than we ever thought him. But, Basil ; how worn and ill you are looking ! Have you not told Ralph everything ? Are you in any danger ?

“None, Clara—none, indeed !”

“Don’t grieve too deeply about yesterday ! The only chance is to try and forget that horrible parting, and all that brought it about. He has not spoken of it since,

except to tell me that I must never know more of your fault and your misfortune, than the little—the very little—I know already. And I have resolved not to think about it, as well as not to ask about it, for the future. I come here to try and make you happier, dear, not more melancholy : so forget the wrong you have suffered, and those who have inflicted it, for *my* sake. I have a hope already, Basil—very, very far off fulfilment—but still a hope. Can you not think what it is ?”

“ Your hope is far off fulfilment indeed, Clara, if it is hope from my father !”

“ Hush ! don’t say so ; I know better. Something occurred, even so soon as last night—a very homely, trifling event—but enough to show that he thinks of you, already, in grief far more than in anger.”

“ I wish I could believe it, love ; but my remembrance of yesterday—”

“Don’t trust that remembrance; don’t recall it! I will tell you what occurred. Some time after you had gone, and after I had recovered myself a little in my own room, I went down-stairs again to see my father; for I was too terrified and too miserable at what had happened, to be alone. He was not in his room when I got there. As I looked round me for a moment, I saw the pieces of *your* page in the book about our family, scattered on the floor; and the miniature likeness of you, when you were a child, was lying among the other fragments. It had been torn out of its setting in the paper, but not injured. I picked it up, Basil, and put it on the table, at the place where he always sits; and laid my own little locket, with your hair in it, by the side so that he might know that the miniature had not been accidentally taken up and put there by the servant. Then, I gathered

together the pieces of the page and took them away with me, thinking it better that he should not see them again. Just as I had got through the door that leads into the library, and was about to close it, I heard the other door, by which you enter the study from the hall, opening ; and he came in, and went directly to the table. His back was towards me, so I could look at him unperceived. He observed the miniature directly, and stood quite still with it in his hand, for a long time ; then sighed—sighed so bitterly !—and then took the portrait of our dear mother from one of the drawers of the table, opened the case in which it is kept, and put your miniature inside, very gently and tenderly. I could not trust myself to see any more, so I went up to my room again ; and shortly afterwards he came in with my locket, and gave it me back, only saying : ‘ You left this on my table, Clara.’

But if you had seen his face then, you would have hoped all things from him in the time to come, as I hope now."

"And as I *will* hope, Clara, though it be from no stronger motive than gratitude to you."

"Before I left home," she proceeded, after a moment's silence, "I thought of your loneliness, dear, in this strange place—knowing that I could seldom come to see you, and then only by stealth; by committing a fault which, if my father found it out—but we won't speak of that! I thought of your lonely hours here; and I have brought with me an old, forgotten companion of your's, a faithful associate of past times, to bear you company, and to keep you from thinking too constantly on what you have suffered. Look, Basil! won't you welcome this old friend again?"

She gave me a small roll of manuscript,

with an effort to resume her arch, kind smile of former days, even while the tears stood thick in her eyes. I untied the leaves; glanced at the hand-writing; and saw before me, once more, the first few chapters of my unfinished romance! Again I looked on the patiently-laboured pages, familiar relics of that earliest and best ambition which I had abandoned for love; too faithful records of the tranquil, ennobling pleasures which I had lost for ever! Oh for one Thought-Flower now, from the dream-garden of the happy Past!

“ I took more care of those leaves of writing, after you had thrown them aside, than of anything else I had,” said Clara. “ I always thought the time would come, when you would return again to the occupation which it was once your greatest pleasure to pursue, and my greatest pleasure to watch. And surely that time has arrived—surely,

dear, your best resource now, is in returning to your old happy employment, and so diverting your thoughts from subjects on which they must not, and need not dwell. I am certain, Basil, your book will help you to wait patiently for happier times, as nothing else can. This place must seem very strange and lonely ; but the sight of those pages, and the sight of me sometimes (when I can come), may make it look almost like home to you ! The room is not—not very—”

She stopped suddenly. I saw her lip tremble, and her eyes grow dim again, as she looked round her. When I tried to speak all the gratitude I felt, she turned away quickly, and began to busy herself in rearranging the wretched furniture ; in setting in order the glaring ornaments on the chimney-piece ; in hiding the holes in the ragged window curtains ; in changing, as far as she could, to a look of homely neatness

all the tawdry discomfort of my one miserable little room. She was still absorbed in this occupation, when the church-clocks of the neighbourhood struck the hour—the hour that warned her to stay no longer.

“I must go,” she said: “it is later than I thought. Don’t be afraid about my getting home: old Martha came here with me, and is waiting down-stairs to go back (you know we can trust her). Write to me as often as you can: I shall hear about you every day, from Ralph; but I should like a letter sometimes, as well. Be as hopeful and as patient yourself, dear, under misfortune, as you wish *me* to be; and I shall despair of nothing. Don’t tell Ralph I’ve been here—he might be angry. I will come again, the first opportunity; for I cannot, and will not believe that I am doing wrong; though if it was known at home, I tremble to think of what might happen! Good bye, Basil! Let

us try and part happily, in the hope of better days. Good bye, dear—good bye, only for the present !”

Her self-possession nearly failed her, as she kissed me, and then turned to the door. She just signed to me not to follow her downstairs, and, without looking round again, hurried from the room.

It was well for the preservation of our secret that she had so resolutely refrained from delaying her departure. She had been gone but for a few minutes—the lovely and consoling influence of her presence was still fresh in my heart—I was still looking sadly over the once precious pages of manuscript which she had restored to me—when Ralph returned from North Villa. I heard him leaping, rather than running, up the rickety wooden stairs. He burst into my room more impetuously than ever.

“Victory! victory!” he cried, jumping

back to his former place on the bed. "As far as Mr. Shop-keeper is concerned, the trump-card in Fortune's pack has turned up to you. We can buy him for anything we like—for nothing at all, if we choose to be stingy. His innocent daughter has made the best of all confessions, just at the right time. Basil, my boy, she's bolted!"

"What do you mean?"

"Bolted, by Jupiter! Gone off to the hospital! gone to see how you have marked that fellow—what's his name?"

"Mannion!"

"Yes, Mannion: I've got his letter to her. She's criminated by it, even past her father's contradiction—and he doesn't stick at a trifle! But I'll begin at the beginning, and tell you everything. Hang it, Basil, you look as if I'd brought you bad news instead of good!"

"Never mind how I look, Ralph—pray go on!"

“Well: the first thing I heard, on getting to the house, was that Sherwin’s wife was dying. The servant took in my name; but I thought of course I shouldn’t be admitted. No such thing! I was let in at once; and the first words this fellow, Sherwin, said to me, were, that his wife was only ill; that the servants were exaggerating; and that he was quite ready to hear what Mr. Basil’s ‘highly-respected’ brother (fancy calling *me* ‘highly-respected!’) had to say to him. The fool, however, as you see, was cunning enough to try civility to begin with. A more ill-looking human mongrel I never set eyes on! He’d be the making of any historical painter who could get him to sit as a model for Judas Iscariot! I took the measure of my man directly; and in two minutes, told him exactly what I came for, without softening a single word.”

“And how did he answer you?”

“As I anticipated, by beginning to bluster

immediately. I took him down, just as he swore his second oath. ‘Sir,’ said I, very politely, ‘if you mean to make a cursing and a swearing conference of this, I think it only fair to inform you beforehand that you are likely to get the worst of it. When the whole repertory of British oaths is exhausted, I can swear fluently in five foreign languages; I have always made it a principle to pay back abuse at compound interest; and I don’t exaggerate in saying, that I am quite capable of swearing you out of your senses, if you persist in setting me the example. And now, if you like to go on, pray do—I’m ready to hear you.’ While I was speaking, he stared at me in a state of helpless astonishment: when I had done, he began to bluster again—but it was a pompous, dignified, parliamentary sort of bluster, now; ending in his pulling your unlucky marriage-certificate out of his pocket,

asserting for the fiftieth time, that the girl was innocent, and declaring that he'd make you acknowledge her, if he went before a magistrate to do it. That's what he said when *you* saw him, I suppose?"

"Yes: almost word for word."

"I had my answer ready for him, before he could put the certificate back in his pocket. 'Now, Mr. Sherwin,' said I, 'have the goodness to listen to me. My father has certain family prejudices and nervous delicacies, which I do not inherit from him; and which I mean to take good care to prevent you from working on. At the same time, I beg you to understand that I have come here without his knowledge. I am not my father's ambassador, but my brother's—who is unfit to deal with you, himself; because he's not half hard-hearted, or half worldly enough. As my brother's envoy, therefore; and out of consideration

for my father's peculiar feelings, I now offer you from my own resources, a certain annual sum of money, far more than sufficient for all your daughter's expenses—a sum payable quarterly, on condition that neither you nor she shall molest us; that you shall never make use of our name anywhere; and that the fact of my brother's marriage (hitherto preserved a secret) shall for the future be consigned to oblivion. *We* keep our opinion of your daughter's guilt—you keep your opinion of her innocence. *We* have silence to buy, and *you* have silence to sell, once a quarter; and if either of us break our conditions, we both have our remedy—*your's* the easy remedy, *our's* the difficult. This arrangement—a very unfair and dangerous one for *us*; a very advantageous and safe one for *you*—I understand that you finally refuse?' 'Sir,' says he, solemnly, 'I should be un-

worthy the name of a father if—.’ ‘Thank you’—I cut in, feeling that he was falling back on sentimental comedy—‘thank you; I quite understand: we’ll get on, if you please, to the reverse side of the question.’ ”

“The reverse side! What reverse side, Ralph? What could you possibly say more?”

“You shall hear. ‘Being on your part, thoroughly determined,’ said I, ‘to permit no compromise, and to make my brother (his family of course included) acknowledge a woman, of whose guilt they entertain not the slightest doubt, you think you can gain your object by threatening an exposure. Don’t threaten any more! Make your exposure! Go to the magistrate at once, if you like! Gibbet our names in a newspaper report, as a family connected by marriage with Mr. Sherwin the linendraper’s daughter, whom they believe to have disgraced

herself as a woman and a wife for ever. Do your very worst ; make public every shameful particular that you can—what advantage will you get by it ? Revenge ? But, will revenge put a halfpenny into your pocket ? Will revenge pay a farthing towards your daughter's keep ? Will revenge make us receive her ? Not a bit of it ! We shall be driven up into a corner ; we shall have no exposure to dread, after you have exposed us ; we shall have no remedy left, but a desperate remedy, and we'll go to law—boldly, openly go to law ! We are wealthy people, Mr. Sherwin, and can afford to pay for one of the most expensive legal luxuries in this country—the luxury of divorce. We have written evidence which you know nothing about, and can call testimony which you cannot gag. I am no lawyer ; but I'll bet you five hundred to one (quite in a friendly way, my dear Sir !) that

we get our case. What follows? We send you back your daughter, without a shred of character left to cover her; and we comfortably wash our hands of *you* altogether."

"Ralph! Ralph! how could you—"

"Stop! hear the end of it. Of course I knew that we couldn't carry out this divorce-threat, without its being the death of my father; but I thought a little quiet bullying on my part, might do Mr. Shopkeeper Sherwin some good. And I was right. You never knew a man sit sorer on the sharp edges of a dilemma, than he did. He wriggled and fidgetted, and got dignified one moment, and lachrymose the next, and argumentative after that, and simply impudent to crown all. I stuck to my point in spite of everything: silence and money; or exposure and divorce: just which he pleased. 'I deny every one of your infamous imputations,' said he. 'That's not

the question,' said I. 'I'll go to your father,' said he. 'You won't be let in,' said I. 'I'll write to him,' said he. 'He won't receive your letter,' said I. There, we came to a pull-up. *He* began to stammer and splutter, and *I* refreshed myself with a pinch of snuff (I've taken to the snuff-box lately, *vice* dice-box resigned). Well: he found it wouldn't do; so threw off the Roman at last, and resumed the Tradesman. 'Even supposing I consented to this abominable compromise, what is to become of my daughter?' said he. 'Just what becomes of other people who have comfortable annuities to live on,' said I. 'Affection for my deeply-wronged child, half inclines me to consult her wishes, before we settle anything—I'll go up-stairs,' said he. 'And I'll wait for you down here,' said I."

"Did he object to that?"

"Not he! He went up-stairs; and in a

few minutes ran down again, with an open letter in his hand, looking as if the devil was after him before his time. At the last three or four stairs, he tripped; caught at the bannisters; dropped the letter over them in doing so; tumbled into the passage in such a fury and fright that he looked like a madman; tore his hat off a peg; and rushed out. I just heard him say:—‘Damn her! she shall come back if I put a straight-waistcoat on her!’ as he passed the door. Between his tumble, his passion, and his hurry, he never thought of coming back for the letter he’d dropped over the banisters. I picked it up before I went away, suspecting it might be good evidence on our side; and I was right. Read it yourself, Basil; you have every moral and legal claim on the precious document—and here it is.”

I took the letter; and read (in Mannion’s

handwriting) these words, dated from the hospital :

“ I have received your last note, and cannot wonder that you are getting impatient under restraint. But, remember, that if you had not acted as I warned you beforehand to act in case of accidents—if you had not protested innocence to your father, and preserved total silence towards your mother—if you had not kept in close retirement, behaving like a domestic martyr, and avoiding, in your character of a victim, all voluntary mention of your husband’s name—if, in short, you had not remained perfectly passive during my inevitable absence, your position might have been a very awkward one. Not being able to help you, the only thing I could do was to teach you how to help yourself. I gave you the lesson ; and you have been wise enough to profit by it.

“The time has now come for a change in my plans. I have suffered a relapse; and the date of my discharge from this place is still uncertain. I doubt the security, both on your account and on mine, of testing your patience and risking chances any longer, by still leaving you at your father’s house to await my cure. Come to me here, therefore, to-morrow; at any hour when you can get away unperceived. You will be let in as a visitor, and shown to my bedside, if you ask for Mr. Turner—the name I have given to the hospital authorities. Through the help of a friend outside these walls, I have arranged for a lodging in which you can live undiscovered, as your own mistress, until I am discharged and can join you. You can come here twice a week, if you like; and you had better do so, to accustom yourself to the sight of my injuries. I told you in my first letter how and where they have

been inflicted—when you see them with your own eyes, you will be best prepared to hear what my future purposes are, and how you can aid them.

“ You need trouble yourself no longer to act innocence, or to deceive your mock-husband: you will know why, when we meet. Your future destiny lies with *me*: a new and adventurous career is before you; and you will take your first step in it, by coming here to-morrow, as I bid you.

“ R. M.”

This was evidently the very letter, about which I had been consulted by the servant at North Villa—the date corresponded with the date at the end of Mannion’s letter to me. I noticed that the envelope was missing; and asked Ralph whether he had got it.

“ No,” he replied; “ Sherwin dropped the letter just in the state in which I have

given it to you. I suspect the girl took away the envelope with her, thinking that the letter which she left behind her, was inside. But the loss of the envelope doesn't matter. Look there: the fellow has written her name at the bottom of the leaf, as coolly as if it was an ordinary correspondence. She's identified with the letter, and that's all we want in our future dealings with her father."

"But, Ralph, do you think—"

"Do I think he'll get her back? If he's in time to catch her at the hospital, he assuredly will. If not, we shall have some little trouble on our side, I suspect. This seems to me to be how the matter stands now, Basil:—After that letter, and her running away, Sherwin will have nothing for it but to hold his tongue about her innocence: we may consider *him*, as settled, and done with. As for the other rascal, Mannion, he certainly writes as if he meant

to do something dangerous. If he really does attempt to annoy us, we'll mark him again (I'll do it next time, by way of a little change!)—or we'll hand him over to the police; and so have done with him. *He* has no marriage certificate to shake over our heads, at any rate; and he'd rather hold his tongue, depend on it, than publicly confess himself thrashed—what's the matter now? You're looking pale again!"

I *felt* that my colour was changing, while he spoke. There was something ominous in the contrast which, at that moment, I could not fail to draw between Mannion's enmity, as Ralph ignorantly estimated it, and as I really knew it. Already the first step towards the conspiracy with which I was threatened, had been taken by the departure of Sherwin's daughter from her father's house. Should I, at this

earliest warning of coming events, show my brother the letter I had received from Mannion? No! such defence against the dangers threatened in it, as Ralph would be sure to counsel, and to put in practice, might only include *him* in the life-long persecution which menaced *me*. I shrank from the bare thought of involving my brother thus; and, when he repeated his remark about my sudden paleness, merely accounted for it by some common-place excuse, and begged him to proceed.

“I suppose, Basil,” said he, “the truth is, that you can’t help being a little shocked—though you could expect nothing better from the girl—at her boldly following this fellow Mannion, even to the hospital.” (Ralph was right: in spite of myself, this feeling was one among the many which now influenced me). “Setting that aside, however, we are quite ready, I

take it, to let her stick to her choice, and live just as she pleases, so long as she don't live under our name. There's the great fear and great difficulty now! If Sherwin can't find her, *we* must: otherwise, we can never feel certain that she is not living under your name, and incurring all sorts of debts as your wife. If her father gets her back, I shall be able to bring her to terms at North Villa—if not, I must get speech of her, wherever she happens to be hidden. She's the only thorn in our side now; and we must pull her out with gold pincers immediately. Don't you see that, Basil?"

"Yes: but—"

"But how are we to make sure of her, you want to know? Either to-night, or to-morrow morning, I'll communicate with Sherwin, and find out whether he has laid paternal hands on her. If he hasn't, we

must go to the hospital, and see what we can discover for ourselves. Don't look miserable and down-hearted, Basil—I'll go with you: you needn't see her again, or the man either; but you must come with me, for I may be obliged to make use of you. And now, I'm off for to-day, in good earnest. I must get back to Madame, (unfortunately she happens to be one of the most sensitive women in the world) or she will be sending to advertize me in the newspapers. We shall pull through this, my dear fellow; you'll see we shall!—By the bye, you don't know of a nice little detached house in the Brompton neighbourhood, do you?—most of my old theatrical friends live about there—a detached house, mind! The fact is, I've taken to the violin lately (I wonder what I shall take to next!); Madame accompanies me on the piano-forte; and I *rather* think we should be an execrable

nuisance to very near neighbours—that's all ! Ah ! you don't know of a house ? Never mind ; I'll go to an agent, or something of that sort. Clara shall know to-night that we are moving prosperously, if I can only give ' Missus ' the slip—she's a little obstinate ; but, I assure you, a really superior woman. Only think of my dropping down to fiddling, snuff-taking, and rent-and-tax-paying in a suburban villa ! How are the fast men fallen !—Good bye, Basil : good bye ! ”

III.

THE next morning, Ralph never appeared—the day passed on, and I heard nothing—at last, when it was evening, a letter came from him.

The letter informed me, that my brother had written to Mr. Sherwin, simply asking whether he had recovered his daughter. The answer to this question did not arrive till late in the day; and was in the negative—Mr. Sherwin had not found his daughter. She had left the hospital before he got

there ; and no one could tell him whither she had gone. His language and manner, as he himself admitted, had been so violent that he was not allowed to enter the ward where Mannion lay. When he returned home, he found his wife at the point of death ; and on the same evening she expired. Ralph described his letter, as the letter of a man half out of his senses. He only mentioned his daughter, to declare, in terms almost of fury, that he would accuse her before his wife's surviving relatives, as having been the cause of her mother's death ; and called down the most terrible denunciations on his own head, if he ever spoke to his child again, though he should see her starving before him in the streets. In a postscript, Ralph informed me that he would call the next morning, and concert measures for tracking Sherwin's daughter to her present retreat.

Every sentence in this letter bore warning

of the crisis which was now close at hand ; yet I had as little of the desire, as of the power to prepare for it. A superstitious conviction that my actions were governed by a fatality which no human foresight could alter or avoid, began to strengthen within me. From this time forth, I awaited events with the uninquiring patience, the helpless resignation of despair. But one sensation still remained active within me—horror at the thought of seeing Mánnion again ; fearful, perpetual suspicion of his appearance with every new day, with every succeeding hour.

My brother came, punctual to his appointment. When he proposed that I should at once accompany him to the hospital, I never hesitated at doing as he desired. We reached our destination. I stood, silent and alone, before the grim Palace of Pain where Mannion lay, and

whither the pure and beautiful Margaret of my first and only love-dreams had followed him ; while Ralph approached the gates, to make his first inquiries.

He was still speaking to the porter, when a gentleman advanced towards them, on his way out of the hospital. I saw him recognise my brother ; and heard Ralph exclaim :

“ Bernard ! Jack Bernard ! Have *you* come to England, of all the men in the world ! ”

“ Why not ? ” was the answer. “ I got every surgical testimonial the *Hôtel Dieu* could give me, six months ago ; and couldn’t afford to stay in Paris only for my pleasure. Do you remember calling me a ‘ mute, inglorious Liston,’ long ago, when we last met ? Well ! I’ve come to England to soar out of my obscurity and blaze into a shining light of the profession. Plenty of practice at

the hospital, here—very little anywhere else, I'm sorry to say,”

“You don't mean that you belong to *this* hospital?”

“My dear fellow, I'm regularly on the staff; I'm here every day of my life.”

“You're the very man to enlighten us. Here, Basil! cross over, and let me introduce you to an old Paris friend of mine. Mr. Bernard—my brother. You've often heard me talk, Basil, of a younger son of old Sir William Bernard's, who preferred a cure of bodies to a cure of souls, and actually insisted on working in a hospital when he might have idled in a family living. This is the man—the best of doctors and of good fellows.”

“And are you bringing your brother to the hospital to follow my mad example?” asked Mr. Bernard, as he shook hands with me.

“Not exactly, Jack! But we really have an object in coming here. Can you give us ten minutes’ talk, somewhere in private? We want to know about one of your patients.”

He led us into an empty room, on the ground-floor of the building. “Leave the matter in my hands,” whispered Ralph to me, as we sat down. “I’ll find out everything.”

“Now, Bernard,” he said, “you have a man here, who calls himself, Mr. Turner?”

“Are *you* a friend of that mysterious patient? Wonderful! The students call him ‘The Great Mystery of London;’ and I begin to think the students are right. Do you want to see him? When he’s not got his green shade on, he’s rather a startling sight, I can tell you, for unprofessional eyes.”

“No, no—at least, not at present; my

brother here, not at all. The fact is, certain circumstances have happened which oblige us to look after this man ; and which I am sure you won't inquire into, when I tell you that it is our interest to keep them secret ?”

“ Certainly not !”

“ Then, without any more words about it, our object here, to-day, is to find out everything we can about Mr. Turner, and the people who have been to see him. Didn't a woman come, the day before yesterday ?”

“ Yes ; and behaved rather oddly, I believe. I was not here, when she came ; but was told she asked for Turner, in a very agitated, anxious manner. She was directed to the Victoria Ward, where he is ; and when she got there, looked excessively flurried and excited—I suppose, seeing the Ward quite full, and not being used to hospitals. But,

however it was, though the nurse pointed out the right bed to her, she ran in a mighty hurry to the wrong one."

"I understand," said Ralph; "just as some women run into the wrong omnibus, when the right one is straight before them."

"Exactly. Well: she only discovered her mistake (the room being rather dark), after she had stooped down close over the stranger, who was lying with his head away from her. By that time, the nurse was at her side, and led her to the right bed. There, I'm told, another scene happened. At sight of the patient's face, which is very frightfully disfigured, she was on the point (as the nurse thought) of going into a fit; but Turner stopped her in an instant. He just laid his hand on her arm, and whispered something to her; and, though she turned as pale as ashes, she was quiet directly. The next thing they say he did,

was to give her a slip of paper, coolly directing her to go to the address written on it, and to come back to the hospital again, as soon as she could show a little more resolution. She went away at once—nobody knows where.”

“But somebody has asked where—eh?”

“Yes: a fellow who said he was her father, and who behaved like a madman. He came here about an hour after she had left, and wouldn’t believe that we knew nothing about her (how the deuce *should* we know anything!) He threatened Turner (whom, by the bye, he called Manning, or some such name) in such an outrageous manner that we were obliged to refuse him admission. Turner himself will give no information on the subject; but I suspect that his injuries are the result of a quarrel with the father about the daughter—a pretty savage quarrel, I must say, looking

to the consequences which—I beg your pardon, but your brother seems very ill! I'm afraid," (turning to me) "you find the room rather close?"

"No, indeed: not at all. I have just recovered from a serious illness—but pray go on."

"I have very little more to say. The father went away in a fury, just as he came: the daughter has not yet made her appearance a second time. But, after what was reported to me of the first interview, I dare say she *will* come. She must, if she wants to see Turner; he won't be out, I suspect, for another fortnight. He's been making himself worse by perpetually writing letters: we were rather afraid of erysipelas, but he'll get over that danger I think."

"But, about the woman," said Ralph; "it is of the greatest importance that we

should know where she is now living. Is there any possibility (we'll pay well for it) of getting some sharp fellow to follow her home from this place, the next time she comes here?"

Mr. Bernard hesitated a moment, and considered ; then said :

"I think I can manage it for you with the porter, after you are gone—provided you leave me free to give any remuneration I may think necessary."

"Anything in the world, my dear fellow. Have you got pen and ink? I'll write down my brother's address: you can communicate results to him, as soon as they occur."

While Mr. Bernard went to the opposite end of the room, in search of writing materials, Ralph whispered to me:

"If he wrote to *my* address, Madame might see the letter. She's the most amiable of her sex ; but if written information of a

woman's residence, directed to me, fell into her hands—you understand, Basil ! Besides, it will be easy to let me know, the moment you hear from Jack. Look up, young one ! It's all right—we're sailing with wind and tide."

Here, Mr. Bernard brought us pen and ink. While Ralph was writing my address, his friend said to me :

"I hope you will not suspect me of wishing to intrude on your secrets, if (assuming your interest in Turner to be the reverse of a friendly interest) I warn you to look sharply after him, when he leaves the hospital. Either there has been madness in his family, or his brain has suffered from his external injuries. Legally, he may be quite fit to be at large ; for he will be able to maintain the appearance of perfect self-possession in all the ordinary affairs of life. But, morally, I am convinced that he is a dangerous monomaniac

—his mania being connected with some fixed idea which evidently never leaves him day or night. I would lay a heavy wager that he dies in a prison or a madhouse.”

“And I’ll lay another wager, if he’s mad enough to annoy *us*, that we are the people who shut him up,” said Ralph. “There’s the address. And now, we needn’t waste your time any longer. I’ve taken a little place at Brompton, Jack—you and Basil must come and dine with me, as soon as the carpets are down.”

We left the room. As we crossed the hall, a gentleman came forward, and spoke to Mr. Bernard.

“That man’s fever, in the Victoria Ward, has declared itself at last,” he said. “This morning, the new symptoms have fairly appeared.”

“And what do they indicate?”

“Typhus of the most malignant character

--not a doubt of it. Come up, and look at him."

I saw Mr. Bernard start, and glance quickly at my brother. Ralph fixed his eyes searchingly on his friend's face; exclaimed: "Victoria Ward! why you mentioned that--;" and then stopped, with a very strange and sudden alteration in his expression. The next moment, he drew Mr. Bernard aside, saying: "I want to ask you whether the bed in Victoria Ward, occupied by this man whose fever has turned to typhus, is the same bed, or near the bed which--" The rest of the sentence was lost to me as they walked away.

After talking together in whispers for a few moments, they rejoined me. Mr. Bernard was explaining the different theories of infection to Ralph.

"*My* notion," he said, "is, that infection is taken through the lungs: one breath in-

haled from the infected atmosphere hanging immediately around the diseased person, and generally extending about a foot from him, being enough to communicate his malady to the breather—provided there exists, at the time, in the individual exposed to catch the malady, a constitutional predisposition to infection. This predisposition we know to be greatly increased by mental agitation, or bodily weakness; but, in the case we have been talking of,” (he looked at me) “the chances of infection or non-infection may be equally balanced. At any rate, I can predict nothing about them at this stage of the discovery.”

“You will write the moment you hear anything?” said Ralph, shaking hands with him.

“The very moment. I have your brother’s address safe in my pocket.”

We separated. Ralph was unusually silent

and serious on our way back. He took leave of me at the door of my lodging, very abruptly ; without referring again to our visit to the hospital.

A week passed away, and I heard nothing from Mr. Bernard. During this interval, I saw little of my brother—he was occupied in moving into his new house. Towards the latter part of the week, he came to inform me that he was about to leave London for a few days. My father had asked him to go to the family house, in ——shire, on business connected with the local management of the estates, with which, as heir to the property, it was his duty to become acquainted. Ralph still retained all his old dislike of the steward's accounts and the lawyer's consultations ; but he felt bound, out of gratitude for my father's special kindness to him, since his return to England, to put a constraint on his own inclinations, and go to the country as he was

desired. He did not expect to be absent more than two or three days ; but earnestly charged me to write to him, if I had any news from the hospital while he was away.

During the week, Clara came twice to see me—escaping from home by stealth, as before. On each occasion, she showed the same affectionate anxiety, in the same simple, natural manner, to set me an example of cheerfulness, and to sustain me in hope. I saw, with a sorrow and apprehension which I could not altogether conceal from her, that the wasting, weary look in her face had never changed, never diminished since I had first observed it. Ralph had, from motives of delicacy, avoided increasing the hidden anxieties which were but too evidently preying upon her health, by keeping her in perfect ignorance of our visit to the hospital, and, indeed, of the particulars of all our proceedings since his return. I took care to preserve the

same secrecy, during her short interviews with me. She bade me farewell after her third visit, with a sadness which she vainly endeavoured to hide. I little thought, then, that the tones of her sweet, clear voice had fallen on my ear for the last time before I wandered to the far West of England where I now write.

At the end of the week—it was on a Saturday, I remember—I left my lodgings early in the morning, to go into the country ; with no intention of returning before evening. The presentiment of bitter trial and trouble to come, had never left me. Since the day when I accompanied Ralph to the hospital, vague thoughts and dread suspicions which I dared not realize, which I shrank from in terror, had passed darkly over my mind. The indescribable mental conflict and apprehension from which I suffered, began to affect my health more and more seriously.

I arose, on the morning to which I have referred, feeling a sense of oppression which was almost unendurable. The perspiration stood thick on my forehead, though the day was not unusually hot ; the air of London grew harder and harder to breathe, with every minute ; my heart felt tightened to bursting ; my temples throbbed with fever-fury ; my very life seemed to depend on escaping into pure air, into some place where there was shade from trees, and water that ran cool and refreshing to look on. So I set forth, careless in what direction I went ; and remained in the country all day. Evening was changing into night as I got back to London.

I inquired of the servant at my lodging, when she let me in, whether any letter had arrived for me. She answered, that one had come just after I had gone out in the morning, and that it was lying on my table.

My first glance at it, showed me Mr. Bernard's name written in the corner of the envelope. I eagerly opened the letter, and read these words :

“ Private.

“ Friday.

“ My dear Sir,

“ On the enclosed slip of paper you will find the address of the young woman, of whom your brother spoke to me when we met at the hospital. I regret to say, that the circumstances under which I have obtained information of her residence, are of the most melancholy nature.

“ The plan which I arranged for discovering her abode, in accordance with your brother's suggestion, proved useless. The young woman never came to the hospital a second time. Her address was given to me this morning, by Turner himself, who begged that I would visit her professionally, as he

had no confidence in the medical man who was then in attendance on her. Many circumstances combined to make my compliance with his request anything but easy or desirable; but knowing that you—or your brother I ought, perhaps, rather to say—were interested in the young woman, I determined to take the very earliest opportunity of seeing her, and consulting with her medical attendant. I could not get to her till late in the afternoon. When I arrived, I found her suffering from one of the worst attacks of Typhus I ever remember to have seen; and I think it my duty to state candidly, that I believe her life to be in imminent danger.—At the same time, it is right to inform you that the gentleman in attendance on her does not share my opinion: he still thinks there is a good chance of saving her.

“ There can be no doubt whatever, that she was infected with Typhus at the hospital.

You may remember my telling you, how her agitation appeared to have deprived her of self-possession, when she entered the ward; and how she ran to the wrong bed, before the nurse could stop her. The man whom she thus mistook for Turner, was suffering from fever which had not then specifically declared itself; but which did so declare itself, as a typhus fever, on the morning when you and your brother came to the hospital. This man's disorder must have been infectious, when the young woman stooped down close over him, under the impression that he was the person she had come to see. Although she started back at once, on discovering her mistake, she had breathed the infection into her system—her mental agitation at the time, accompanied (as I have since understood) by some physical weakness, rendering her specially liable to the danger to which she had accidentally exposed herself.

“ Since the first symptoms of her disease appeared, on Saturday last, I cannot find that any error has been committed in her medical treatment, as reported to me. I remained some time by her bedside to-day, observing her. The delirium which is, more or less, an invariable result of Typhus, is particularly marked in her case, and manifests itself both by speech and gesture. It has been found impossible to quiet her, by any means hitherto tried. While I was watching by her, she never ceased calling on your name, and entreating to see you. I am informed by her medical attendant, that her wanderings have almost invariably taken this direction for the last four-and-twenty hours. Occasionally she mixes other names with your’s, and mentions them in terms of abhorrence; but her persistency in calling for your presence, in, at times, almost raving to see you, is so remarkable that I am tempted, merely from what I have heard

myself, to suggest that you really should go to her, on the bare and doubtful chance that your presence might exercise some tranquillising influence. At the same time, if you fear infection, or for any private reasons (into which I have neither the right nor the wish to inquire) feel unwilling to take the course I have pointed out, pray do not hesitate to be guided entirely by your own wishes. In my opinion, no human interference can now save her—but doctors, as well as drowning men, sometimes catch at straws; and the straw *I* catch at, is your presence by her bedside. I have sometimes found the moral remedy succeed, where the medical remedy failed: but this case is desperate; so, I repeat it, do not by any means consider it your duty to accede to my proposal. I can conscientiously assure you that duty is not involved in it.

“ I have, however, another suggestion

to make, which is of a positive nature ; and which I am sure will meet with your approval. It is, that her parents, or some of her other relations, if her parents are not alive, should be informed of her situation. Possibly, you may know something of her connections, and can therefore do this good office. She is dying in a strange place, among people who avoid her as they would avoid a pestilence. Used as I am to sad sights, there is a loneliness and a misery about the situation of this unhappy young woman, which it really shocks one to think of. Even though it be only to bury her, some relation ought to be immediately summoned to her bedside.

“ I shall visit her twice to-morrow, in the morning and at night. If you are not willing to risk seeing her (and I repeat that it is in no sense imperative that you should combat such unwillingness), perhaps you

will communicate with me at my private address,

“ I remain, dear Sir,

“ Faithfully your’s,

“ JOHN BERNARD.

“ P.S.—I open my letter again, to inform you that Turner, acting against all advice, has left the hospital to-day. He attempted to go on Tuesday last, when, I believe, he first received information of the young woman’s serious illness ; but was seized with a violent attack of giddiness, on attempting to walk, and fell down just outside the door of the ward. On this second occasion, however, he has succeeded in getting away without any accident—as far, at least, as the persons employed about the hospital can tell.”

When the letter fell from my trem-

bling hand; when, shuddering under the horror of all that I had read, I first asked of my own heart the fearful question:—“Have I, to whom the mere thought of ever seeing this woman again has been as a pollution to shrink from, the strength to stand by her death-bed; the martyr-courage to see her die?”—when, at that moment of awful doubt, at that dread pause of life in the spirit within me, I took counsel with myself—then, and not till then, did I really know how suffering had fortified while it had humbled me; how affliction has the power to purify as well as to pain.

Away from me—fast and far away—departed the first poor, earthly thought of the ill that she had done me, of the bitter misery that I had inherited at her hands. And, in its stead, there passed over my heart a sudden stillness and calmness, which brought back the memory of her

dying mother, and made it plead with me for mercy for the dying child. Once more, that mother's last words of earthly lament : —“ Oh, who will pray for her when I am gone !” seemed to be murmuring in my ear—murmuring in solemn harmony with the command which bade humanity rise again to its angel-origin, when the Voice from the Mount of Olives taught forgiveness of injuries to all mankind.

She was dying ; dying among strangers in the pining madness of fever—and the one being of all who knew her, whose presence at her bedside might yet bring calmness to her last moments, and give her quietly and tenderly to death, was the man whom she had pitilessly deceived and dishonoured, whose youth she had ruined, whose hopes she had wrecked for ever. Strangely had destiny brought us together—terribly had it separated us—awfully would it now unite us again, at the end !

What were my wrongs, heavy as they had been ; what my sufferings, poignant as they still were, that they should stand between the dying woman, and the last hope of awakening her to the consciousness that she was going before the throne of God ? The sole resource for her which human skill and human pity could now suggest, embraced the sole chance that she might still be recovered for repentance, before she was resigned to death. How did I know, but that in those ceaseless cries which had uttered my name, there spoke the last earthly anguish of the tortured spirit, calling upon me for one drop of water to cool its burning guilt—one drop from the waters of Peace ?

I took up Mr. Bernard's letter from the floor on which it had fallen, and re-directed it to my brother ; simply writing on a blank place in the inside, " I have gone to soothe her last moments." My resolution was

taken. The one cry of her agony had been a cry for my presence; and, though my heart broke in the effort, I would obey the voice that called me to her death.

But, before I departed, I wrote to her father and summoned him to her bedside. The guilt of his absence—if his heartless and hardened nature did not change towards her; if he repented not of the vows against her by which he had impiously bound himself since she had left his house—would now rest with him, and not with me. I forebore from thinking how he would answer my letter; for I remembered his written words to my brother, declaring that he would accuse his daughter of having caused her mother's death; and I suspected him, even then, of wishing to shift the shame of his conduct towards his unhappy wife from himself to his child.

After writing this second letter, I set forth

instantly for the house to which Mr. Bernard had directed me. Never, since the first days of my calamity, had I known such patience, such resignation, such steady resolution to endure all trials, as I now felt. No thought of myself; no thought, even, of the peril suggested by the ominous disclosure about Mannion, in the postscript to Mr. Bernard's letter, ever crossed my mind. In the great stillness, in the mysterious, heavenly serenity that had come to my spirit, the wasting fire of every sensation which was only of this world, seemed quenched for ever.

It was eleven o'clock when I arrived at the house. A slatternly, sulky woman opened the door to me. "Oh! I suppose you're another doctor," she muttered, staring on me with scowling eyes. "I wish you were the undertaker, to get her out of my house before we all catch our deaths of her!

There ! there's the other doctor coming down stairs ; he'll show you the room : I won't go near it."

As I took the candle from her hand, I saw that Mr. Bernard was approaching me from the stairs.

" You can do no good, I am afraid," said he ; " but I am glad you have come."

" There is no hope, then ?"

" In my opinion, none. Turner came here this morning : whether she recognised him, or not, in her delirium, I cannot say ; but she grew so much worse in his presence, that I insisted on his not seeing her again, except under medical permission. Just now, there is no one in the room—are you willing to go up stairs at once ?"

" Does she still speak of me in her wanderings ?"

" Yes : as incessantly as ever."

" Then I am ready to follow your suggestion, and go to her bedside."

“And be assured that I feel deeply what a sacrifice you are making. Since I wrote to you, much that she has said in her delirium has told me”—(he hesitated)—“has told me more, I am afraid, than you would wish me to have known, as a comparative stranger to you. I will only say, that secrets unconsciously disclosed on the death-bed are secrets sacred to me, as they are to all who pursue my calling; and that what I have unavoidably heard above stairs, is doubly sacred in my estimation, as affecting a near and dear relative of one of my oldest friends.” He paused, and took my hand very kindly; then added: “I am sure you will think yourself rewarded for any trial to your feelings, to-night, if you can only remember in years to come, that your presence quieted her in her last moments!”

I felt his sympathy and delicacy too strongly to thank him in words: I could

only *look* my gratitude as he asked me to follow him up stairs.

We entered the room softly. Once more, and for the last time in this world, I stood in the presence of Margaret Sherwin.

Not even to see her, as I had last seen her, standing ghastly before me, by the lurking-place which had been the scene of her guilt, was such a sight of misery as to behold her now, forsaken on her death-bed ; to look on her, as she lay with her head turned from me, fretfully covering and uncovering her face with the loose tresses of her long black hair, and muttering my name incessantly in her wild fever-dream : “ Basil ! Basil ! Basil ! I’ll never leave off calling for him, till he comes. Basil ! Basil ! you can’t stop me unless you kill me. Basil ! Where is he ? Oh, where, where, where ! ”

“ He is here,” said the doctor, taking the candle from my hand, and holding it, so that

the light fell full on my face. "Look at her and speak to her as usual; when she turns round," he whispered to me.

Still she never moved; still those hoarse, fierce, quick tones—that voice, once the music that my heart beat to; now the discord that it writhed under—muttered on, faster and faster: "Basil! Basil! Bring him here! bring me Basil!"

"He *is* here," repeated Mr. Bernard loudly. "Look! look up at him!"

She turned in an instant, and tore the hair back from her face. For a moment, I forced myself to look on her; for a moment, I confronted the smouldering fever in her cheeks; the glare of the bloodshot eyes; the distortion of the parched lips; the hideous clutching of the outstretched fingers at the empty air—but the agony of that sight was more than I could endure: I turned away my head, and hid my face in horror.

“Compose yourself,” whispered the doctor. “Now she’s quiet, speak to her: speak to her before she begins again: call her by her name.”

Her name! Could my lips utter it at such a moment as this!

“Quick! quick!” cried Mr. Bernard. “Try her while you have the chance.”

I struggled against the memories of the past, and spoke to her—God knows as gently, if not as happily, as in the by-gone time!

“Margaret,” I said, “Margaret, you asked for me, and I have come.”

She tossed her arms above her head with a shrill scream, frightfully prolonged till it ended in low moanings and murmurings: then turned her face from us again, and pulled her hair over it once more.

“I am afraid she is too far gone,” said the doctor; “but make another trial.”

“Margaret,” I said again, “have you forgotten me? Margaret!”

She looked at me once more. And this time, her dry, dull eyes seemed to soften, and her fingers twined themselves less passionately in her hair. Then she began to laugh—a low, vacant, terrible laugh.

“Ah! yes, yes,” she said, “I know he’s come at last: I can make him do anything. Get me my bonnet and shawl; any shawl will do, but a mourning shawl is best, because we are going to the funeral of our wedding. Come, Basil! let’s go back to the church, and get unmarried again: that’s what I wanted you for. We don’t care about each other: Robert Mannion wants me more than you do—he’s not ashamed of me because my father’s a tradesman, at any rate; *he* won’t make believe that he’s in love with me, and then marry me to spite the pride of his family. Come! I’ll tell the clergyman

to read the service backwards; that makes a marriage no marriage at all, everybody knows."

As the last wild words escaped her, some one below stairs called to Mr. Bernard. He went out for a minute; then returned again, telling me that he was summoned to a case of sudden illness which he must attend without a moment's delay.

"The medical man whom I found here when I first came," said he, "was sent for, this evening, into the country; to be consulted about an operation, I believe: but, if anything happens, I shall be at your service. There is the address of the house to which I am now going," (he wrote it down on a card) — "you can send, if you want me. I will get back, however, as soon as possible, and see her again: she seems to be a little quieter already, and may become quieter still, if you stay longer. The night-nurse is below—I will

send her up as I go down stairs. Keep the room well ventilated, the windows open as they are now. Don't breathe too close to her, and you need fear no infection. Look there! her eyes are still fixed on you. This is the first time I have seen her look in the same direction for two minutes together; one would think she really recognised you. Wait till I come back, if you possibly can—I won't be a moment longer than I can help."

He hastily left the room. I turned to the bed, and saw that she was still looking at me. She had never ceased murmuring to herself, while Mr. Bernard was speaking; and she did not stop, when the nurse came in.

The first sight of this woman, on her entrance, sickened and shocked me. All that was naturally repulsive in her, was made doubly revolting by the hideous characteristics of the habitual drunkard, lowering and glaring at me in her purple, bloated face. To

see her heavy hands shaking at the pillow, as they tried mechanically to arrange it; to see her stand, alternately leering and scowling by the bedside, an incarnate blasphemy in the sacred chamber of death, was to behold the most horrible of all mockeries, the most impious of all profanations. No loneliness in the presence of mortal agony could try me to the quick, as the sight of that foul old age of degradation and debauchery defiling the sick-room, now tried me. I determined to wait alone by the bedside till Mr. Bernard returned.

With some difficulty, I made the wretched drunkard understand that she might go down stairs again; and that I would call her, if she was wanted. At last, she comprehended my meaning, and slowly quitted the room. The door closed on her; and I was left alone to watch the last moments of the woman who had ruined me!

Still, even in the woful loneliness of that

lonely bedside, there was a voice within me which spoke peace to the stormy memories of the past. Still, while those restless eyes followed my slightest movements with fearful perseverance, and those wild, wandering accents muttered on mournfully, there was a gentle and a hushing influence that seemed to be watching with me through my awful vigil. As I sat down near the open window, the sounds outside in the street told of the waning of the night. There was an echo of many footsteps, a hoarse murmur of conflicting voices, now near, now afar off. The public-houses were dispersing their drunken crowds—the crowds of a Saturday night: it was twelve o'clock.

Through those street-sounds of fierce ribaldry and ghastly mirth, the voice of the dying woman penetrated, speaking more slowly, more distinctly, more terribly than it had spoken yet.

“I see him,” she said, staring vacantly

on me, and moving her hands, to and fro in the air, with slow, strange gestures. "I see him! But he's a long way off; he can't hear our secrets, and he don't suspect you as mother does. Don't tell me that about him any more: my flesh creeps at it!—What are you looking at me in that way for? You make me feel on fire. You know I like you, because I *must* like you; because I can't help it. *You* are a man; a strong, daring, conquering man: *he's* a ——. It's no use saying hush: I tell you, he can't hear us and can't see us. He can see nothing; you make a fool of him, and I make a fool of him. But mind! I *will* ride in my own carriage: you must keep things secret enough to let me do that. I say, I *will* ride in my carriage: and I'll go where father walks to business: I don't care if I splash him with *my* carriage-wheels! I'll be even with him for some

of the passions he's been in with me. You see how I'll go into our shop, and order dresses! (be quiet! I say he can't hear us). I'll have velvet where his sister has silk, and silk where she has muslin: I'm a finer girl than she is, and I'll be better dressed.—Tell *him* anything, indeed! What have I ever let out? It's not so easy always to make believe I'm in love with him, after what you've told me. Suppose he found us out?—Rash? I'm no more rash than you are! Why didn't you come back from France in time, and stop it all? Why did you let me marry him?—A nice wife I've been to him, and a nice husband he's been to me—a husband who'll wait a year! Baby-husband—Ha! ha! School-boy husband who waits a year!”

I approached nearer to the bedside, and spoke to her again, in the hope to win her tenderly towards dreaming of better things.

I know not whether she heard me ; but her wild thoughts changed—changed darkly to later events.

“Beds ! beds !” she cried, “beds everywhere, with restless, moaning, dying men on them ! And one bed the most terrible of all—look ! look at it ! The deformed face—how horrible it is with the white of the willow all round it ! *His* face ? *his* face, that hadn’t a fault in it ? Never ! It’s the face of a devil ; it’s a face from hell : look ! the scars of hell, the finger-nails of the devil, are on it ! Take me away ! drag me out ! I can’t move for that face : it’s always before me : it gets larger and larger : it’s walling me up among the beds : it’s burning me all over. Water ! water ! drown me in the sea ; drown me deep, away from the burning face !”

“Hush, Margaret ! hush ! drink this, and you will be cool again.” I gave her some lemonade, which stood by the bedside.

“ Yes, yes ; hush, as you say. Where’s Robert ? Robert Mannion ?—not here ! then I’ve got a secret for you. When you go home to-night, Basil, and say your prayers, pray for a storm of thunder and lightning ; and pray that I may be struck dead in it, and Robert too. It’s a fortnight to my aunt’s party ; and in a fortnight you’ll wish us both dead, so you had better pray for what I tell you in time. We shall make handsome corpses : put roses into my coffin—scarlet roses, if you can find any, because that stands for Scarlet Woman—in the Bible, you know. Scarlet ? What do I care ! It’s the boldest colour in the world. Robert will tell you, and all your family, how many women are as scarlet as I am—virtue wears it at home, in secret ; and vice wears it abroad, in public : that’s the only difference *he* says. Scarlet roses ! scarlet roses ! throw them into the coffin

by hundreds ; smother me up in them ! and then bury me down deep, in the dark, quiet street—where there's a broad door-step in front of a house, and a white, wild face, something like Basil's, that's always staring down on the door-step awfully. I shall be quiet there, where the Scarlet Roses grow—oh ! quiet, quiet, where the Scarlet Roses grow !”

She uttered the last words in slow, measured cadence—the horrible mockery of a chaunt which she used to play to us at North Villa, on Sunday evenings. Then her voice sank again : her articulation thickened, and grew indistinct. It was like the change from darkness to daylight, in the sight of sleepless eyes, to hear her only murmuring now, after hearing her last terrible words.

The time, the woeful weary night-time, passed on. Longer and longer grew the

intervals of silence between the scattered noises from the streets; less and less frequent were the sounds of distant carriage wheels, and the echoing, rapid footsteps of late pleasure-seekers hurrying home—until at last, the heavy tramp of the policeman going his rounds, alone disturbed the silence of the early morning hours. Still, the voice from the bed muttered incessantly; but now, in drowsy, languid tones: still, Mr. Bernard did not return: still, the father of the dying girl never came, never obeyed the letter which summoned him for the last time to her side.

(And there was yet one more among the absent—but one from whose approach the death-bed must be kept sacred; one, whose evil presence was to be dreaded as a pestilence and a scourge. Mannion!—where was Mannion?)

I sat by the window, resigned to wait

in loneliness till the end came ; watching mechanically the vacant eyes that ever watched *me* ; absorbed in the grieving and the solemn thoughts of the place and hour —when, suddenly, the face of Margaret seemed to fade out of my sight. I started and looked round. The candle, which I had placed at the opposite end of the room, had burnt down without my noticing it, and was now expiring in the socket. I ran to light the fresh candle which lay on the table by its side ; but was too late. The wick flickered its last ; the room was left in darkness.

While I felt among the different objects under my hands for a box of matches : Margaret's voice strengthened again.

“ Innocent ! innocent ! ” I heard her cry mournfully through the darkness. “ I'll swear I'm innocent, ann father it sure to swear it too. Innocent Margaret ! Oh, me ! what innocence ! ”

She repeated these words over and over again, till the hearing them seemed to bewilder all my senses. I hardly knew what I touched. Suddenly, my searching hands stopped of themselves ; stopped, I could not tell why. Was there some change in the room ? Was there more air in it, as if a door had been opened ? Was there something moving over the floor ? Had Margaret left her bed ?—No ! the mournful voice was speaking still, and speaking from the same distance.

I moved to search for the matches on a chest of drawers which stood near the window. Though the morning was at its darkest, and the house stood midway between two gas-lamps, there was a glimmering of light in this place. I looked back into the room from the window, and thought I saw something shadowy moving near the bed. “Take him away !” I heard Margaret scream in her wildest tones. “Quick ! quick ! Kill him !

His hands are on me: he's feeling my face, to feel if I'm dead!"

I ran to her, striking against some piece of furniture in the darkness. Something passed swiftly between me and the bed, as I got near it. I thought I heard a door close. Then, there was silence for a moment; and then, as I stretched out my hands, my right hand encountered the little table placed by Margaret's side, and the next moment, I felt the match-box that had been left on it.

As I struck a light, her voice muttered close at my ear:

"The face! The deformed face! Tear me away from it!—quick! quick! tear me away!"

The match flared up. As I carried it to the candle, I looked round, and noticed for the first time that there was a second door, at the further corner of the room, which

lighted some inner apartment through glass panes at the top. When I tried this door, it was locked on the inside, and the room beyond was dark.

Dark and silent. But was no one there, hidden in that darkness and silence? Was there any doubt now, that stealthy feet had approached Margaret, that stealthy hands had really touched her, while the room was in obscurity?—Doubt? There was none on that point, none on any other. Suspicion shaped itself into conviction in an instant; and, shuddering, identified the stranger who had passed in the darkness between me, and the bedside, with the man whose presence I had dreaded, as the presence of an evil spirit in the chamber of death.

He was waiting secretly in the house—waiting for her last moments; listening for her last words; watching his opportunity, perhaps, to enter the room again, and openly

profane it by his presence ! I placed myself by the door, resolved, if he approached, to thrust him back, at any hazard, from the bedside. How long I remained absorbed in watching before the darkness of the inner room, I know not—but some time must have elapsed before the silence around me, forced itself suddenly on my attention. I turned towards Margaret ; and, in an instant, all previous thoughts were suspended in my mind, by the sight that now met my eyes.

She had altered completely. Her hands, so restless hitherto, lay quite still over the coverlid ; her lips never moved ; the whole expression of her face had changed—the fever-traces remained on every feature, and yet the fever-look was gone. Her eyes were almost closed ; her quick breathing had grown calm and slow. I touched her pulse : it was beating with a wayward, fluttering gentleness.

What did this striking alteration indicate? Recovery? Was it possible? As the idea crossed my mind, every one of my faculties became absorbed in the sole occupation of watching her face: I could not have stirred an instant from the bed, for worlds.

The earliest dawn of day was glimmering faintly at the window, before another change appeared—before she drew a long, sighing breath and slowly opened her eyes on mine. Their first look was very strange and startling to behold; for it was the look that was natural to her; the calm look of consciousness, restored to what it had always been in the past time. But it lasted only for a moment. She recognised me; and, instantly, an expression of anguish and shame flew over the first wild terror and surprise of her face. She struggled vainly to lift her hands—so busy all through the night; so idle now! A faint moan of supplication breathed from

her lips ; and she slowly turned her head on the pillow, so as to hide her face from my sight.

“ Oh, my God ! my God ! ” she murmured, in low, wailing tones, “ I’ve broken his heart, and he still comes here to be kind to me ! Basil ! Oh, Basil ! go ! This is worse than death ! I’m too bad to be forgiven—leave me ! leave me !—leave me to die ! ”

I spoke to her ; but desisted almost immediately, in terror—desisted even from uttering her name. At the mere sound of my voice, her suffering rose to agony : the wild despair of the soul wrestling awfully with the writhing weakness of the body, uttered itself in words and cries horrible, beyond all imagination, to hear. I sank down on my knees by the bedside ; the calm strength of heart which had sustained me for hours, gave way in an instant ; and I burst into an hysterical passion of tears, as my spirit

poured from my lips in supplication for her's —tears that did not humiliate me ; for I knew, while I shed them, that I had forgiven her !

The dawn brightened. Gradually, as the fair light of the new day flowed in lovely upon her bed ; as the fresh morning breeze lifted tenderly and playfully the scattered locks of her hair that lay over the pillow—so, the calmness began to come back to her voice and the stillness of repose to her limbs. But she never turned her face to me again : never, when the wild words of her despair grew fewer and fainter : never, when the last faint supplication to me, to leave her to die forsaken as she deserved, ended mournfully in a long, moaning gasp for breath. I waited after this—waited a long time—then spoke to her softly—then waited once more ; hearing her still breathe, but slowly and more slowly with every minute—then spoke to

her for the second time, louder than before : but she never answered, and never moved. Was she sleeping ? I could not tell. Some influence seemed to hold me back from going to the other side of the bed, to look at her face, as it lay away from me, almost hidden in the pillow.

The light strengthened faster, and grew mellow with the clear beauty of the morning sunshine. I heard the sound of rapid foot-steps advancing along the street ; they stopped under the window ; and then, a voice which I recognised, called me by my name. I looked out : Mr. Bernard had returned at last.

“ I could not get back sooner,” he said, “ the case was desperate ; and I was afraid to leave it. You will find a key on the chimney-piece—throw it out to me, and I can let myself in : I told them not to bolt the door before I went out.”

I obeyed his directions. When he entered the room, I thought Margaret moved a little ; and signed to him with my hand to make no noise. He looked towards the bed without any appearance of surprise ; and asked me, in a whisper, when the change had come over her, and how. I told him very briefly, and inquired whether he had known of such changes in other cases, like her's.

“Many,” he answered, “many changes just as complete and extraordinary, which have raised hopes that I never knew realised. Expect the worst from the change you have witnessed : it is a fatal sign.”

Still, in spite of what he said, it seemed as if he feared to wake her ; for he spoke in his lowest tones, and walked very softly when he went close to the bedside.

He stopped suddenly, just as he was about to feel her pulse, and looked in the direction of the glass door — listened attentively

—and said, as if to himself: “I thought I heard some one moving in that room; but I suppose I’m mistaken: nobody can be up in the house yet;” then, looked down on Margaret, and gently parted back her hair from her forehead.

“Don’t disturb her,” I whispered, “she is asleep: surely, she is asleep!”

He paused before he answered me, and placed his hand on her heart. Then softly drew up the bed-linen, till it hid her face.

“Yes, she *is* asleep,” he said gravely; “asleep, never to wake again. She is dead.”

I turned aside my head in silence; for my thoughts, at that moment, were not the thoughts which can be spoken by man to man.

“This has been a sad scene for any one at your age,” he resumed kindly, as he left the bedside, “but you have borne it well.

I am glad to see that you can behave so calmly under so hard a trial."

Calmly?

Yes! at that moment, it was fit that I should be calm; for I could remember that I had forgiven her.

IV.

ON the fourth day from the morning when she had died, I stood alone in the church-yard by the grave of Margaret Sherwin.

It had been left for me to watch her dying moments ; it was left also for me to bestow on her remains the last human charity which the living can extend to the dead. If I could have looked into the future on our fatal marriage-day, and could have known that the only home of my giving which she

would ever inhabit, would be the home or the grave !—

Her father had written me a letter, which I destroyed at the time ; and which, if I had it now, I should forbear from copying into these pages. Let it be enough for me to relate here, that he never forgave the action by which she thwarted him in his mercenary designs upon me, and upon my family ; that he diverted from himself the suspicion and disgust of his wife's surviving relatives (whose hostility he had some pecuniary reasons to fear), by accusing his daughter, as he had declared he would accuse her, of having been the real cause of her mother's death ; and that he took care to give the appearance of sincerity to the indignation which he professed to feel against her, by refusing to follow her remains to the place of burial.

Ralph had returned to London, as soon

as he received the letter from Mr. Bernard which I had forwarded to him. He offered me his assistance in performing the last duties left to my care, with an affectionate earnestness that I had never seen him display towards me before. But Mr. Bernard had generously undertaken to relieve me of every responsibility which could be assumed by others; and on this occasion, therefore, I had no need to put my brother's ready kindness in helping me to the test.

I stood alone by the grave. Mr. Bernard had taken leave of me; the workers and the idlers in the churchyard had alike departed—there was no reason why I should not follow them; and yet I remained, with my eyes fixed upon the freshly-turned earth at my feet, thinking of the dead.

Some time had passed thus, when the sound of approaching footsteps attracted my attention. I looked up; and saw a man,

clothed in a long cloak drawn loosely around his neck, and wearing a shade over his eyes which hid the whole upper part of his face, advancing slowly towards me, walking with the help of a stick. He came on straight to the grave, and stopped at the foot of it—stopped opposite me, as I stood at the head.

“Do you know me again?” he said. “Do you know me for Robert Mannion?” And, as he pronounced his name, he raised the shade and looked at me.

The first sight of that appalling face with its ghastly discolouration of sickness, its hideous deformity of feature, its fierce and changeless malignity of expression glaring full on me in the piercing noonday sunshine—glaring with the same unearthly look of fury and triumph which I had seen flashing through the flashing lightning, when I parted from him on the night of the storm—struck me speechless and motionless where I

stood ; and has never left me since. I must not, I dare not, I cannot describe that frightful sight ; though it now rises before my imagination, vivid in its horror as on the first day when I saw it—though it moves hither and thither before me fearfully, while I write ; though it lowers at my window, a noisome shadow on the radiant prospect of earth, and sea, and sky, whenever I look up from the page towards the beauties of my cottage-view.

“ Do you know me for Robert Mannion ? ” he repeated. “ Do you know the work of your own hands, now you see it ? Or, am I changed to you past recognition ; as *your* father might have found *my* father changed, if he had seen him on the morning of his execution, standing under the gallows, with the cap drawn over his face ? ”

Still I could neither speak nor move. I could only look away from him in horror, and fix my eyes on the ground.

He lowered the shade to its former position on his face—then spoke again.

“ Under this earth that we stand on,” he said, setting his foot on the grave ; “ down here, where you are now looking, lies buried with the buried dead, the last influence which might one day have gained you respite and mercy at my hands. Did you think of the one, sole chance that you were losing, when you came to see her die? I watched *you*, and I watched *her* : I heard as much as you heard ; I saw as much as you saw ; I know when she died, and how, as you know it—I shared her last moments with you, to the very end. It was my fancy not to give her up, as your sole possession, even on her death-bed : it is my fancy, now, not to let you stand alone—as if her corpse was your property—over her grave !”

While he uttered the last words, I felt my self-possession returning. But, I could not force myself to speak, as I would fain have

spoken—I could only move away, to leave him.

“Stop!” he said, “what I have still to say, concerns you. I have to tell you, face to face, standing with you here, over her dead body, that what I wrote from the hospital, is what I will do, and more than do; that I will make your whole life to come, one long expiation of this deformity” (he pointed to his face), “and of that death” (he set his foot once more on the grave). “As surely as your father made me the leper of the social community into which I was born, so surely will I make a leper of you. Go where you will, this face of mine shall never be turned away from you; this tongue, which you can never silence but by a crime, shall awaken against you the dormant superstitions and cruelties of all mankind—shall make the noisome secret of that night when you followed us, reek up like a pestilence, in

the nostrils of your fellow-beings, be they whom they may, the wise and the ignorant alike. You may shield yourself behind your family and your friends—I will strike at you through the dearest and the bravest of them ! You may believe that I am raving like a madman of sheer impossibilities—the next time we meet you shall acknowledge, with your own lips, that I can act as I speak ! Now you have heard me, go !—go your way, as I go mine : our paths will cross, however you try to separate them. Live the free life which Margaret Sherwin has restored to you by her death—you will know it soon for the life of Cain ! ”

He turned from the grave, and left me by the way that he had come ; but the hideous image of him, and the remembrance of the words he had spoken, never left me. Never, for a moment, while I lingered alone in the churchyard ; never, when I quitted

it, and walked through the crowded streets. The horror of the fiend-face was still before my eyes, the poison of the fiend-words was still in my ears, when I returned to my lodging, and found Ralph waiting to see me as soon as I entered my room.

“At last you have come back!” he said; “I was determined to stop till you did, if I stayed all day. Hang it, Basil! is anything the matter? Have you got into some worse scrape than ever?”

“No, Ralph—no. But what have you to tell me?”

“Something that will rather surprise you, Basil: I have to tell you to leave London at once?”

“Leave London! what do you mean?”

“Yes, leave London, for your own interests and for everybody else’s. My father has found out that Clara has been to see you.”

“ Good heavens ! how ? ”

“ I don’t know ; he won’t tell me. But he has found it out. You know how you stand in his opinion—I leave you to imagine from that, what he thinks of Clara’s conduct in coming here.”

“ No ! no ! tell me yourself, Ralph—tell me how she bears his displeasure ! ”

“ As badly as possible. After having forbidden her in his own quiet, firm way, ever to enter this house again, he now only shows how he is offended, by his silence ; and it’s exactly that, of course, which distresses her. Between her notions of implicit obedience to *him*, and her opposite notions, just as strong, of her sisterly duties to *you*, she’s made miserable from morning to night. She looked so dreadfully ill to-day, that she quite gave me a start, when I saw her. One minute, she’s shocked at the thought of openly disobeying my father—the next,

more shocked at the thought of staying away from you. What she will end in, if things go on like this, I'm really afraid to think; and I'm not easily frightened, as you know. Now, Basil, just listen to me: it's *your* business to stop this, and *my* business to tell you how."

"I will do anything you wish—anything for Clara's sake!"

"Then, as I said before, leave London; and so cut short this unlucky struggle between her duty and her inclination. If you don't, my father is quite capable of taking her at once into the country, though I know he has important business to keep him in London. Write a letter to her, saying that you have gone away for your health, for change of scene and peace of mind—gone away, in short, to come back better some day. Don't say where you're going, and don't tell me; for she's sure to

ask, and sure to get it out of me if I know. Then she might be writing to you, and that might be found out, too. She can't distress herself about your absence, if you account for it properly, as she distresses herself now—that's one consideration. And you will serve your own interests, as well as Clara's, by going away—that's another."

"Never mind *my* interests—Clara! I only think of Clara!"

"But you *have* interests, and you must think of them. I told my father of the death of that unhappy woman, and of your noble behaviour when she was dying. Don't interrupt me, Basil—it *was* noble: I couldn't have done what you did, I can tell you! Well, I saw he was more struck by it than he was willing to confess; but, of course, so soon as this, he won't let an accident change all his ideas on the subject of what you have done. He talked of never feeling

confidence in you again ; and much more to the same purpose. Depend upon it, however, a considerable impression has been made on him by the strange turn circumstances have taken. Only leave that impression to strengthen, Basil, and you're safe. But if you destroy it by staying here, after what has happened, and keeping Clara in this new dilemma—why, my dear fellow, you destroy your best chance ! There's a sort of defiance of him, in stopping : there's a downright concession to him, in going away."

"And I *will* go, Ralph ; for you have more than convinced me that I ought ! I will go to-morrow ; though where—"

"You have the rest of the day to think where, *I* should go abroad and amuse myself ; but your ideas of amusement are, most likely, not mine. At any rate, wherever you go, I can always supply you with money, when you want it ; you can write to

me, after you have been away some little time, and I can write back, as soon as I have good news to tell you. Only stick to your present determination, Basil, and, I'll answer for it, you'll be back in your own study at home, before you're many months older !”

“ I will put it out of my power to fail in my resolution, by writing to Clara at once, and giving you the letter to place in her hands to-morrow evening, when I shall have left London some hours.”

“ That's right, Basil ! that's acting and speaking like a man !”

I wrote immediately, accounting for my sudden absence as Ralph had advised me —wrote, with a boding and a heavy heart, all that I thought would be most reassuring and cheering to Clara ; and then, without allowing myself time to hesitate or to think, gave the letter to my brother.

“She shall have it to-morrow night,” he said, “and my father shall know why you have left town, at the same time. Depend on me in this, as in everything else. And now, Basil, I must say good bye—unless you’re in the humour for coming to look at my new house this evening? Ah! I see that won’t suit you just now: so, good bye, old fellow! Write when you are in any necessity—get back your spirits and your health—and never doubt that the step you are now taking will be the best for Clara, and the best for yourself!”

He hurried out of the room, evidently feeling more at saying farewell than he was willing to let me discover. I was left alone for the rest of the day, to think whither I should turn my steps on the morrow.

I knew that it would be best that I should leave England; but there seemed to have grown within me, suddenly, a yearning

towards my own country that I had never felt before—a home-sickness for the land in which my sister lived. Not once, did my thoughts wander away to foreign places, while I now tried to consider calmly in what direction I should depart when I left London.

While I was still in doubt, my earliest impressions of childhood came back to my memory ; and, influenced by them, I thought of Cornwall. My nurse had been a Cornish woman : my first fancies and first feelings of curiosity had been excited by her Cornish stories ; by the descriptions of the scenery, the customs, and the people of her native land, with which she was ever ready to amuse me. As I grew older, it had always been one of my favourite projects to go to Cornwall ; to explore the wild western land, on foot, from hill to hill throughout. And now, when no motive of pleasure could influence my choice : now, when I was going

forth homeless and alone, in uncertainty, in grief, in peril, the old fancy of long past days still kept its influence, and pointed out my new path to me among the rocky boundaries of the Cornish shore.

My last night in London was a night made terrible by Mannion's fearful image in all my dreams—made mournful, in my waking moments, by thoughts of the morrow which was to separate me from Clara. But I never faltered in my resolution to leave London for her sake. When the morning came, I collected my few necessities; added to them one or two books; and was ready to depart.

My way through the streets took me near my father's house. As I passed by the well-remembered neighbourhood, my self-control so far deserted me, that I stopped and turned aside into the Square where we all used to live together so happily, in the

hope of seeing Clara once more before I went away. Cautiously and doubtfully, as if I was a trespasser even on the public pavement, I looked up at the house which was no more my home—at the windows, side by side, of my sister's sitting-room and bed-room. But she was neither standing near them, nor passing accidentally from one room to another at that moment. Still I could not persuade myself to go on. I thought of many and many an act of kindness that she had done for me, which I seemed never to have appreciated until now—I thought of what she had suffered, and might yet suffer, for my sake ; and the longing to see her once more, though only for an instant, still kept me lingering near the house and looking up vainly at the lonely windows.

It was a bright, cool, autumnal morning—perhaps she might have gone out into

the garden of the square: it used often to be her habit, when I was at home, to go there and read at this hour. I walked round, outside the railings, searching for her between gaps in the foliage; and had nearly made the circuit of the garden thus, before the figure of a lady sitting alone under one of the trees attracted my attention. I stopped—looked intently towards her—and saw that it was Clara.

Her face was almost entirely turned from me; but I knew her by her dress, by her figure—even by her position, simple as it was. She was sitting with her hands on a closed book which rested on her knee. A little spaniel that I had given her lay asleep at her feet: she seemed to be looking down at the animal, as far as I could tell by the position of her head. When I moved aside, to try if I could see her face, the trees hid her from sight. I was obliged to be

satisfied with the little I could discern of her, through the one gap in the foliage which gave me a clear view of the place where she was sitting. To speak to her, to risk the misery to both of us of saying farewell, was more than I dared trust myself to do. I could only stand silent, and look on her—it might be for the last time!—until the tears gathered in my eyes, so that I could see nothing more. I resisted the temptation to dash them away. While they still hid her from me ; while I could not see her again, if I would, I turned from the garden view, and left the Square.

Amid all the thoughts which thronged on me, as I walked farther and farther away from the neighbourhood of what was once my home ; amid all the remembrances of past events—from the first day when I met Margaret Sherwin to the day when I stood by her grave—which were recalled by the mere

act of leaving London, there now arose in my mind for the first time, a doubt, which, from that day to this has never left it: a doubt whether Mannion might not be tracking me in secret along every step of my way.

As that fearful uncertainty first suggested itself, I stopped instinctively, and looked behind me. Many figures were moving in the distance; but the figure that I had seen in the churchyard was nowhere visible among them. A little further on, I looked back again, and still with the same result. After this, I let a longer interval elapse before I stopped; and then, for the third time, I turned round, and scanned the busy street-scene behind me with eager, suspicious eyes. Some little distance back, on the opposite side of the way, I caught sight of a man who was standing still, just as I was standing, amid the moving throng. His height was

like Mannion's height ; and he wore a cloak like the cloak I had seen on Mannion, when he approached me at Margaret's grave. More than this I could not detect, without crossing over. The passing vehicles and foot-passengers constantly intercepted my view, from the position in which I stood.

Was this figure, thus visible only by intervals, the figure of Mannion ? and was he really tracking my steps ? As the suspicion strengthened in my mind that it was so, the remembrance of his threat in the churchyard :—" You may shield yourself behind your family and your friends : I will strike at you through the dearest and the bravest of them—" suddenly recurred to me ; and brought with it a thought which urged me instantly to proceed on my way. I never looked behind me again, as I now walked on ; for I said within myself :—" If he is following me, I must not and will not avoid

him : it will be the best result of my departure, that I shall draw after me that destroying presence ; and thus at least remove it far and safely away from my family and my home ! ”

So, I neither turned aside from the straight direction, nor hurried my steps, nor looked back any more. At the time I had resolved on, I left London for Cornwall, without making any attempt to conceal my departure. And though I knew that he must surely be following me, still I never saw him again ; never discovered how close, or how far-off he was on my track.

Two months have passed since that period ; and I know no more about him *now* than I knew *then*.

JOURNAL.

JOURNAL.

October 19th.—MY retrospect is finished. I have traced the history of my errors and misfortunes, of the wrong I have done and the punishment I have suffered for it, from the past to the present time.

The pages of my manuscript (many more than I thought to write at first) lie piled together on the table before me. I dare not look them over : I dare not read the lines which my own hand has traced. There may be much in my manner of writing that wants alteration ; but I have no heart to return to

my task, and revise and reconsider as I might if I were intent on producing a book which was to be published during my lifetime. Others will be found, when I am no more, to correct my errors of expression; to enrich my poverty of style; to carve, and smooth, and polish to the popular taste of the day this rugged material of Truth which I shall leave behind me—Truth told sternly, without suppression or exaggeration; though told always with deep humility, often with tears.

But now, while I collect these leaves, and seal them up, never to be opened again by my hands, can I feel that my task is over, and that I have related all which it is necessary to tell? No! While Mannion lives, and while I am still uncertain whether he may not appear before me with every succeeding hour—while I am ignorant of the changes that may yet be wrought in the home from which I am exiled—there remains

for me a future which must be recorded, as the necessary sequel to the narrative of the past. What may yet happen worthy to be written down, I know not: what sufferings I may yet undergo, which may unfit me for continuing the labour now terminated for a time, I cannot foresee. I have not hope enough in the future, or in myself, to believe that I shall have the time or the energy to write hereafter, as I have written already, from recollection. It is best then, that I should note down events day by day, as they occur; and so ensure, as far as may be, a diurnal continuation of my narrative, fragment by fragment, to the very last.

But first, as a fit commencement to the Journal I now propose to keep, let me briefly reveal something, in this place, of the new life that I am leading in my retirement on the Cornish coast.

The fishing hamlet in which I have written

the preceding pages, is on the southern shore of Cornwall, not more than a few miles distant from the Land's End. The cottage I inhabit is built of rough granite, rudely thatched; and has but two rooms. I possess no furniture but my bed, my table, and my chair; and some half-dozen fishermen and their families are my only neighbours. But I feel neither the want of luxuries, nor the want of society: all that I wished for in coming here, I have—the completest seclusion.

My arrival produced, at first, both astonishment and suspicion. The fishing population of Cornwall still preserve almost all the superstitions, even to the grossest, which were held dear by their humble ancestors, centuries back. My poor, simple neighbours could not understand why I had no business to occupy me; could not reconcile my worn, melancholy face with my youthful years.

Such loneliness as mine looked sinister and unnatural—especially to the women. They questioned me curiously ; and the very simplicity of my answer, that I had only come to Cornwall to live in quiet, and regain my health, perplexed them afresh. They waited, day after day, when I was first installed in the cottage, to see letters sent to me—and no letters arrived : to see my friends join me—and no friends came. This deepened the mystery to their eyes. They began to recall to memory old Cornish legends of solitary, secret people who had lived, years and years ago, in certain parts of the county—coming, none knew whence ; existing, none knew by what means ; dying and disappearing, none knew when. They felt half inclined to identify me with these mysterious visitors—to consider me as some being, a stranger to the whole human family, who had come to waste away under a curse, and die ominously

and secretly among them. Even the person to whom I first paid money for my necessities, questioned, for a moment, the lawfulness and safety of receiving it !

But these doubts gradually died away ; this superstitious curiosity insensibly wore off, among my poor neighbours. They got used to my solitary, thoughtful, and (to them) inexplicable mode of existence. One or two little services of kindness which I rendered, soon after my arrival, to their children, worked wonders in my favour ; and I am pitied now, rather than distrusted. When the results of the fishing are abundant, a little present has been often made to me, out of the nets. Some weeks ago, after I had gone out in the morning, I found on my return, two or three gulls' eggs placed in a basket before my door. They had been left there by the children, as ornaments for my cottage window—the only ornaments they

had to give ; the only ornaments they had ever heard of.

I can now go out unnoticed, with my Bible or my Shakspeare in my hand, directing my steps up the ravine in which our hamlet is situated, towards the old gray stone church which stands solitary on the hill-top, surrounded by the lonesome moor. If any children happen to be playing among the scattered tombs, they do not start and run away, when they see me sitting on the coffin-stone at the entrance of the churchyard, or wandering round the sturdy granite tower, reared by hands which have mouldered into dust centuries ago. My approach has ceased to be of evil omen for my little neighbours. They just look up at me, for a moment, with bright smiles, and then go on with their game.

From the churchyard, I look down the ravine, on fine days, towards the sea. Mighty

piles of granite soar above the fishermen's cottages on each side : the little strip of white sand beach which the cliffs shut in, glows pure in the sunlight : the inland stream that trickles down the bed of the rocks, sparkles, at places, like a rivulet of silver-fire : the round white clouds, with their violet shadows and bright wavy edges, roll on majestically above me : the cries of the sea-birds, the endless, dirging murmur of the surf, and the faint, far music of the wind among the ocean-caverns, fall, now together, now separately on my ear. Nature's voice and Nature's beauty—God's soothing and purifying angels of the soul—speak to me most tenderly and most happily, at such times as these.

It is when the rain falls, and wind and sea arise together—when, sheltered among the caverns in the side of the precipice, I look out upon the dreary waves, and the fierce, leaping spray—that I feel the un-

known dangers which hang over my head in all the horror of their uncertainty. Then, the threats of my deadly enemy strengthen their hold fearfully on all my senses. I see the dim and ghastly personification of a fatality that is lying in wait for me, in the strange shapes of the mist which shrouds the sky, and moves, and whirls, and brightens, and darkens in a weird glory of its own over the heaving waters. Then, the crash of the breakers on the reef, howls upon me with a sound of judgment; and the voice of the wind, growling and battling behind me in the hollows of the cave, is, ever and ever, the same thunder-voice of doom and warning in my ear.

Does this morbid conviction that Manion's eye is always on me, that his footsteps are always secretly following mine, proceed only from the weakness of my worn-out energies? Does this foreboding

of the realization of his wildest threats, which I cannot reason away, spring solely from my want of moral courage? Could others in my situation restrain themselves from fearing, as I do, that he is still incessantly watching me in secret? It is possible. It may be, that his terrible connection with all my sufferings of the past, makes me attach credit too easily to the destroying power which he arrogates to himself, in the future. Or it may be, that all resolution to resist him is paralysed in me, not so much by my fear of his appearance, as by my uncertainty of the time when it will take place—not so much by his menaces themselves as by the delay in their execution. Still, though I can estimate fairly the value of these considerations, they exercise over me no lasting influence of tranquillity. I remember what this man *has* done; and in spite of all reasoning, I believe in what

he has told me he will yet do. Madman though he may be, I have no hope of defence or escape from him in any direction, look where I will.

But for the occupation which the foregoing narrative has given to my mind ; but for the relief—the mournful, yet still the unfailing relief—which my heart can derive from its thoughts of Clara, I must have sunk under the torment of suspense and suspicion in which my life is now passed. My sister ! Even in this self-imposed absence from her, I have still found a means of connecting myself remotely with something that she loves. I have taken, as the assumed name under which I live, and shall continue to live until my father has given me back his confidence and his affection, the name of a little estate that once belonged to my mother, and that now belongs to her daughter. Even the most wretched have

their caprice, their last favourite fancy. I possess no memorial of Clara, not even a letter. The name that I have taken from the place which she was always fondest and proudest of, is, to me, what a lock of hair, a ring, any little loveable, sanctifying keepsake is to others happier than I am.

But, I have wandered away from the simple details of my life in this place. Shall I now return to them? Not to-day: my head burns, my hand is weary. If the morrow should bring with it no event to write of, on the morrow I can resume the subject from which I now break off.

October 20th.—After laying aside my pen, I went out yesterday for the purpose of renewing that former friendly intercourse with my poor neighbours, which has been interrupted for the last three weeks by unintermitting labour at the latter portions of my narrative. In the course of my walk

among the cottages and up to the old church on the moor, I saw fewer of the people of the district than usual. The behaviour of those whom I did chance to meet, seemed unaccountably altered : perhaps it was mere fancy, but I thought they avoided me. One woman abruptly shut her cottage-door as I approached. A fisherman, when I wished him good-day, hardly answered ; and walked on without stopping to gossip with me as usual. Some children, too, whom I overtook on the road to the church, ran away from me, making gestures to each other which I could not understand. Is the first superstitious distrust of me returning, after I thought it had been entirely overcome ? Or are my neighbours only showing their resentment at my involuntary neglect of them for the last three weeks ? I must try to find out to-morrow.

21st.—I have discovered all ! The truth

which I was strangely slow to suspect yesterday, has forced itself on me to-day.

I went out this morning, as I had purposed, to discover whether my neighbours had really changed towards me, or not, since the interval of my three weeks' seclusion. At the cottage-door nearest to mine, two young children were playing, whom I knew I had succeeded in attaching to me soon after my arrival. I walked up to speak to them ; but, as I approached, their mother came out, and snatched them from me with a look of anger and alarm. Before I could question her, she had taken them inside the cottage, and had closed the door.

Almost at the same moment, as if by a preconcerted signal, three or four other women came out from their abodes at a little distance ; warned me in loud, angry voices not to come near them, or their children ; and disappeared, shutting their

doors. Still not suspecting the truth, I turned back, and walked towards the beach. The lad whom I employ to serve me with provisions was lounging there against the side of an old boat. At seeing me, he started up, and walked away a few steps—then stopped, and called out :

“I’m not to bring you anything more : father says he won’t sell to you again, whatever you pay him.”

I asked the boy why his father had said that ; but he ran back towards the village without answering me.

“You had best leave us,” muttered a voice behind me. “If you don’t go of your own accord, our people will starve you out of the place.”

The man who said these words, had been one of the first to set the example of friendliness towards me, after my arrival ; and to him I now turned for the explanation which no one else would give me.

"You know what we mean, and why we want you to go, well enough," was his reply.

I assured him that I did not; and begged him so earnestly to enlighten me, that he stopped as he was walking away.

"I'll tell you about it," he said; "but not now: I don't want to be seen with you." (As he spoke he looked back at the women, who were appearing once more in front of their cottages). "Go home again, and shut yourself up: I'll come at dusk."

And he came as he had promised. But when I asked him to enter my cottage, he declined, and said he would talk to me outside, at my window. This disinclination to be under my roof, reminded me that my supplies of food had, for the last week, been left on the window-ledge, instead of being brought into my room as usual. I had been too constantly occupied to pay much atten-

tion to the circumstance at the time ; but I thought it very strange, now.

“ So, you mean to tell me you don’t suspect why we want to get you away, out of our place here ?” said the man, looking in distrustfully at me through the window.

I repeated that I could not imagine why they had all changed towards me, or what wrong they thought I had done them.

“ Then I’ll soon let you know it,” he continued. “ We want you gone from here, because—”

“ Because,” interrupted another voice behind him, which I recognised as his wife’s, “ because you’re bringing a blight on us, and our houses—because, *we want our children’s faces left as God made them—*”

“ Because,” interposed a second woman, who had joined her, “ you’re bringing devil’s vengeance among Christian people ! Come back, John ! he’s not safe for a true man to speak to.”

They dragged the fisherman away with them before he could say another word. But I had heard enough. The fatal truth burst at once on my mind. Mannion *had* followed me to Cornwall : his threats were executed to the very letter !

(10 o'clock.)—I have lit my candle for the last time in this cottage, to add a few lines to my journal. The hamlet is quiet : I hear no footstep outside—and yet, can I be certain that Mannion is not lurking near my door at this very moment ?

I must go when the morning comes : I must leave this quiet retreat, in which I have lived so calmly until now. There is no hope that I can reinstate myself in the opinions of my poor neighbours. He has arrayed against me the pitiless, unreasoning hostility of their grossest and blindest superstitions, He has found out the dormant cruelties, even in the hearts of these simple people ; and has

awakened them against me, as he said he would. The evil work must have been begun within the last three weeks, while I was much within doors, and there was little chance of meeting me in my usual walks. How that work was accomplished it is useless to inquire : my only object now, must be to prepare myself at once for departure.

(11 *o'clock.*)—While I was putting up my few books, a minute ago, a little embroidered marker fell out of one of them, which I had not observed in the pages before ; and which I recognised as having been worked for me by Clara. I have a memorial of my sister in my possession, after all ! Trifling as it is, I shall preserve it about me, as a messenger of consolation in the time of adversity and peril.

(1 *o'clock.*)—The wind sweeps down on us, from off the moorland, in fiercer and fiercer gusts ; the waves dash heavily against

our rock promontory; the rain drifts wildly past my windows; and the densest darkness overspreads the whole sky. The storm which has been threatening for some days, is gathering fast.

(*Village of T—, October 22nd.*)—The events of this one day have changed the whole future of my life. I must force myself to write of them at once—something warns me that if I delay, though only till to-morrow, I shall be incapable of relating them at all.

It was still early in the morning—I think about seven o'clock—when I closed my cottage door behind me, never to open it again. I met only one or two of my neighbours as I left the hamlet. They drew aside to let me advance, without saying a word. With a heavy heart, grieved more than I could have imagined possible at departing

as an enemy from among the people with whom I had lived as a friend, I passed slowly by the last cottages, and ascended the cliff path which led to the moor.

The storm had raged at its fiercest some hours back. Soon after daylight the wind sank ; but the majesty of the mighty sea had lost none of its terror and grandeur, as yet. The huge Atlantic waves still hurled themselves, foaming and furious, against the massive granite of the Cornish cliffs. Overhead, the sky was hidden in a thick white mist—now hanging, still and dripping, down to the ground ; now rolling in shapes like vast smoke-wreaths before the light wind which still blew at intervals. At a distance of more than a few yards, the largest objects were totally invisible : I had nothing to guide me, as I advanced, but the ceaseless roaring of the sea on my right hand.

It was my purpose to get to Penzance

by night. Beyond that, I had no project ; no thought of what refuge I should seek next. Any faint hope I might have formerly felt of escaping from Mannion, had now deserted me for ever. I could not discover by any outward indications, that he was still following my steps—the mist obscured all objects behind me from view ; the ceaseless crashing of the shore-waves overwhelmed all landward sounds—but I never doubted for a moment that he was watching me, as I proceeded along my onward way.

I walked slowly, keeping from the edge of the precipices, only by keeping the sound of the sea always at the same distance from my ear ; knowing that I was advancing in the proper direction, though very circuitously, as long as I heard the waves on my right hand. To have ventured on the shorter way, by the moor and the cross-roads beyond it, would have been only to have lost

myself, past all chance of extrication, in the mist.

In this tedious manner, I had gone on for some time, before it struck me that the noise of the sea was altering completely to my sense of hearing. It seemed to be sounding very strangely on each side of me—both on my right hand and on my left. I stopped, and strained my eyes to look through the mist; but it was useless. Crags only a few yards off, seemed like shadows in the thick white vapour. Again, I went on a little; and, ere long, I heard rolling towards me, as it were, under my own feet and under the roaring of the sea, a howling, hollow, intermittent sound, like thunder at a distance. I stopped again, and rested against a rock. After some time, the mist began to part to seaward, but remained still as thick as ever on each side of me. I went on towards the lighter sky in front—

the thunder-sound booming louder and louder, in the very heart, as it seemed, of the great cliff.

The mist brightened yet a little more ; and showed me a landmark to ships, standing on the highest point of the surrounding rocks. I climbed to it, recognised the glaring red and white pattern in which it was painted ; and knew that I had wandered, in the mist, away from the regular line of coast, out on one of the great granite promontories which project into the sea, as natural breakwaters, on the southern shore of Cornwall.

I had twice penetrated as far as this place, at the earlier period of my sojourn in the fishing-hamlet ; and, while I now listened to the thunder-sound, I knew from what cause it proceeded.

Beyond the spot where I stood, the rocks descended suddenly, and almost perpendicularly, to the range below them. In one

of the highest parts of the wall-side of granite thus formed, there opened a black, yawning hole that slanted nearly straight downwards, like a tunnel, to unknown and unfathomable depths below, into which the waves found entrance through some subterranean channel. Even at calm times, the sea was never silent in this frightful abyss ; but on stormy days its fury was terrific. The wild waves boiled and thundered in their imprisonment, till they seemed to convulse the solid cliff about them, like an earthquake. But, high as they leapt up in the rocky walls of the chasm, they never leapt into sight from above. Nothing but clouds of spray indicated to the eye, what must be the horrible tumult and glory of the raging waters below.

With my recognition of the place to which I had now wandered, came remembrance of the dangers I had left behind me on the rock-track that led from the mainland to the

promontory—dangers of narrow ledges and treacherous precipices, which I had passed safely, while unconscious of them in the mist; but which I shrank from tempting again, now that I recollected them, until the sky had cleared, and I could see my way well before me. The atmosphere was still brightening slowly over the tossing, distant waves: I determined to wait until it had lost all its obscurity, before I ventured to retrace my steps.

I moved down towards the lower range of rocks, to seek a less exposed position than that which I now occupied. As I neared the chasm, the terrific howling of the waves inside it was violent enough to drown, not only the crashing sound of the surf on the outward crags of the promontory, but even the shrill cries of the hundreds on hundreds of sea-birds that whirled around me, except when their flight was immediately over my head.

At each side of the abyss, the rocks, though very precipitous, afforded firm hold for hand and foot. As I descended them, the morbid longing to look on danger, which has led many a man to the very brink of a precipice, even while he dreaded it, led me to advance as near as I durst to the side of the great hole, and to gaze down into it. I could see but little of its black, shining, interior walls, or of the fragments of rock which here and there jutted out from them, crowned with patches of long, lank sea-weed waving slowly to and fro in empty space—I could see but little of these things; for the spray from the bellowing water in the invisible depths below, steamed up almost incessantly, like smoke; and shot, hissing in clouds out of the mouth of the chasm, on to a huge flat rock covered with sea-weed, that lay beneath and in front of it. The very sight of this smooth, slippery plane of granite shelving steeply downward,

right into the gaping, perpendicular depths of the hole, made my head swim ; the thundering of the water bewildered and deafened me—I moved away while I had the power : away, some thirty or forty yards in a lateral direction, towards the edges of the promontory which looked down on the sea. Here, the rocks rose again in wild shapes, forming natural caverns and penthouses. Towards one of these I now advanced, to shelter myself till the sky had cleared.

I had just entered the place, close to the edge of the cliff, when a hand was laid suddenly and firmly on my arm ; and, through the crashing of the waves below, the thundering of the water in the abyss behind, and the skrieking of the sea-birds overhead, I heard these words, spoken close at my ear :—

“ Your life is *mine* ! Would you steal it from me by a suicide ? ”

I turned, and saw Mannion standing by me. No shade concealed the hideous distortion of his face. His eye was on me, as he pointed significantly down to the surf foaming two hundred feet beneath us.

“Suicide!” he repeated slowly—“would you escape me by a suicide? I suspected it; and, this time, I followed close: followed, to fight with Death, which should have you.”

As I moved back from the edge of the precipice, and shook him from me, I marked the vacancy that glared even through the glaring triumph of his eye; and remembered how I had been warned against him, at the hospital.

The mist was thickening again; but thickening now in clouds that parted and changed minute by minute, under the influence of the light behind them. I had noticed these sudden transitions before, and

knew them to be the signs which preceded the speedy clearing of the atmosphere.

When I looked up at the sky, Mannion stepped back a few paces, and pointed in the direction of the fishing-hamlet from which I had departed.

“Even in that remote place,” he said, “and among those ignorant people, my deformed face has borne witness against you, and Margaret’s death has been avenged, as I said it should. You have been expelled as a pest and a curse, by a community of poor fishermen: you have begun to live your life of social excommunication, as I lived mine. Superstition!—barbarous, monstrous superstition, which I found ready made to my use, is the scourge with which I have driven you from that hiding-place. How did I patiently keep away from you and your neighbourhood, till you had made friends of the people in every cottage? How did I

tell the secret of my deformity when I first showed it to them? how did I make it work on their superstitions, till they dreaded and loathed your presence, as the presence of a living pestilence—till you became a fireside terror, an incarnation of destruction and evil to every woman and child who looked on you? How could I do all this? Do you long, and yet tremble, to know? Remember what I have said and written! remember who I am! and you will wonder at what I have done no more. Look at me now! I have got back my strength; I am no longer the sick refuse of the hospital—where you go, I have the limbs and the endurance to go too! I tell you again, we are linked together for life; I cannot leave you, if I would. The horrible joy of hunting you through the world, leaps in my blood like fire! Look! look out, before you turn back to the moorland, on those tossing

waves—there is no rest for *them* ; there shall be no rest for *you* !”

The sight of him, standing close by me in that wild solitude ; the hoarse sound of his voice, as he raised it almost to raving in his exultation over my helplessness ; the fierce, incessant crashing of the sea on the outer rocks ; the roaring of the tortured waters imprisoned in the depths of the abyss behind us ; the sinister obscurity of the mist, and the strange, wild shapes it began to take, as it now rolled almost over our heads—all that I saw, all that I heard, seemed suddenly to madden me, as Man-nion uttered his last words. My brain felt turned to fire ; my heart to ice. A horrible temptation to rid myself for ever of the wretch before me, by hurling him over the precipice at my feet, seized on me. I felt my hands stretching themselves out towards him, without my willing it—if I had waited

another instant, I should have dashed him or myself to destruction. But I turned back in time ; and, reckless of all danger, fled—literally fled—from the sight of him, over the rugged and perilous surface of the cliff.

The shock of a fall among the rocks, before I had advanced more than a few yards, partly restored my self-possession. Still, I dared not look back to see if Mannion was following me, so long as the precipice behind him was within view.

I began to climb to the higher range of rocks almost at the same spot by which I had descended from them—judging by the close thunder of the water in the chasm. Half-way up, I stopped at a broad resting place ; and found that I must proceed a little, either to the right or the left, in a horizontal direction, before I could easily get higher. At that moment, the mist was slowly brightening again. I looked first to

the left, to see where I could get good foothold—then, to the right, towards the outer sides of the riven rocks close at hand. At the same instant, I caught sight dimly of the figure of Mannion, moving shadow-like below and beyond me, skirting the farther edge of the slippery plane of granite that shelved into the gaping mouth of the hole. The atmosphere brightened still, and showed him that he had risked himself, in the mist, too near to a dangerous place. He stopped—looked up and saw me watching him—raised his hand—and shook it threateningly in the air. The ill-calculated suddenness and violence of his action, in making that menacing gesture, destroyed his equilibrium—he staggered—tried to recover himself—swayed half round where he stood—then fell heavily backward, right on to the steep shelving rock.

The wet sea-weed slipped through his

fingers, as they madly clutched at it. He struggled frantically to throw himself towards the side of the declivity ; slipping further and further down it at every effort. Close to the mouth of the abyss, he sprang up as if he had been shot : a tremendous jet of spray hissed out upon him at the same moment. I heard a scream, so shrill, so horribly unlike any human cry, that it seemed to silence the very thundering of the water. The spray fell. For one instant, I saw two livid and bloody hands tossed up against the black walls of the hole, as he dropped into it. Then, the waves roared again fiercely in their hidden depths ; the spray flew out once more ; and when it cleared off, nothing was to be seen at the yawning mouth of the chasm—nothing moved over the shelving granite, but some torn particles of seaweed sliding slowly downwards in the running ooze.

The shock of that sight must have paralysed within me the power of remembering what followed it; for I can recal nothing, after looking on the emptiness of the rock below, except that a faintness and sickness of heart came over me—that I crouched down on the broad ledge to save myself from falling off it—that there was then an interval of oblivion, lasting I cannot say how long—and that I seemed to awaken again, as it were, to the thundering of the water in the abyss. When I rose and looked around me, the seaward sky was lovely in its clearness; the foam of the leaping waves flashed gloriously in the sunlight; and all that remained of the mist was one great cloud of purple shadow, hanging softly and afar off over the whole inland view.

I traced my way back along the promontory feebly and slowly. My weakness was so great, that I trembled in every limb. A

strange uncertainty about directing myself in the simplest actions, overcame my mind. Sometimes, I stopped short, hesitating in spite of myself at the slightest obstacles in my path. Sometimes, I grew confused without any cause about the direction in which I was proceeding, and fancied I was going back to the fishing village. The sight that I had witnessed, seemed to be affecting me physically, far more than mentally. As I dragged myself on my weary way along the coast, there was always the same painful vacancy in my thoughts: there seemed to be no power in them, yet, of realising Man-nion's appalling death.

By the time I arrived at this village, my strength was so utterly exhausted, that the people at the inn were obliged to help me up stairs. Even now, after some hours' rest, the mere exertion of dipping my pen in the ink begins to be a labour and a

pain to me. There is a strange fluttering at my heart ; my recollections are growing confused again—I can write no more.

23rd.—The frightful scene that I witnessed yesterday still holds the same disastrous influence over me. I have vainly endeavoured to think, not of Mannion's death, but of the new, free prospect which that death has opened to my view. Waking or sleeping, it is as if some fatality kept all my faculties imprisoned within the black walls of the chasm. I saw the livid, bleeding hands flying past them again, in my dreams last night. And now, while the morning is clear and the breeze is fresh, no repose, no change comes to my thoughts. The bright beauty of unclouded daylight seems to have lost the happy power over me which it used formerly to possess.

25th.—All yesterday I had not energy

enough even to add a line to this journal. The strength to control myself seems to have gone from me. The slightest accidental noise in the house, throws me into a fit of trembling which I cannot subdue. Surely, if ever the death of one human being brought release and salvation to another, the death of Mannion has brought them to me; and yet, the effect left on my mind by the horror of having seen it, is still not lessened—not even by the knowledge of all that I have gained by being freed of the deadliest and most determined enemy that man ever had.

26th.—Visions—half waking, half dreaming—all through the night. Visions of my last lonely evening in the fishing-hamlet—of Mannion again—the livid hands whirling to and fro over my head in the darkness—then, glimpses of home; of Clara reading to me in my study—then, a change to the room where Margaret died—the sight of her again,

with her long black hair streaming over her face—then, oblivion for a little while—then, Mannion once more ; walking backwards and forwards by my bedside—his death seeming like a dream ; his watching me through the night, like a reality to which I had just awakened—Clara walking opposite to him on the other side—Ralph between them, pointing at me.

27th.—I am afraid my mind is seriously affected : it must have been fatally weakened before I passed through the terrible scenes among the rocks of the promontory. My nerves must have suffered far more than I suspected at the time, under the constant suspense in which I have been living since I left London, and under the incessant strain and agitation of writing the narrative of all that has happened to me. Shall I send a letter to Ralph ? No—not yet. It might look like impatience, like not being able to bear my

necessary absence as calmly and resolutely as I ought.

28th.—A wakeful night — tormented by morbid apprehensions that the reports about me in the fishing-village may spread to this place ; that inquiries may be made after Man-nion ; and that I may be suspected of having caused his death.

29th.—The people at the inn have sent to get me medical advice. The doctor came to-day : he was kindness itself ; but I fell into a fit of trembling, the moment he entered the room—grew confused in attempting to tell him what was the matter with me—and, at last, could not articulate a single word distinctly. He looked very grave as he examined me and questioned the land-lady. I thought I heard him say something about sending for my friends, but could not be certain.

31st.—Weaker and weaker. I tried in

despair, to-day, to write to Ralph ; but knew not how to word the letter. The simplest forms of expression confused themselves inextricably in my mind. I was obliged to give it up. It is a surprise to me to find that I can still add with my pencil, feebly and briefly, to the entries in this Journal ! When I am no longer thus able to continue in some sort, the employment to which I have been used for so many weeks past, what will become of me ? Shall I then have lost the only safeguard that keeps me in my senses ?

* * * * *

Worse ! worse ! I have forgotten what day of the month it is ; and cannot remember it for a moment together, when they tell me—cannot even recollect how long I have been confined to my bed. I feel as if my heart was wasting away. Oh ! if I

could only see Clara again : could only hear her speak— !

* * * * *

The doctor and a strange man have been looking among my papers. I tried to prevent them ; but—

My God ! am I dying ? dying at the very time when there is a chance of tranquillity and happiness for my future life ?

* * * * *

Clara !—far, far off from her—nothing but the little book-marker she worked for me—leave it round my neck, when I—

I can't move, or breathe, or think—if I could only be taken back to home—if my father could see me as I am now ! Night again—the dreams that *will* come—always of home ; sometimes, the untried home in Heaven, as well as the familiar home on earth—

* * * * *

Clara!—I shall die out of my senses, unless Clara—Break the news gently—it may kill her—

Her face; so bright and calm!—her watchful, weeping eyes always looking on me, with a light in them that shines steady through the quivering tears. While the light lasts, I shall live: when it begins to die out—*

* There are some lines of writing beyond this point; but they are illegible.—*Editor*.

LETTERS IN CONCLUSION.

LETTER I.

FROM WILLIAM PENHALE, MINER, AT B—— ,
IN CORNWALL, TO HIS WIFE IN LONDON.

My dear Mary,

I received your letter yesterday, and was more glad than I can say at hearing that our darling girl, Susan, has got such a good place in London, and likes her new mistress so well. My kind respects to your sister and her husband, and say I don't grumble about the money that's been spent in sending you with Susan to take care of her.

She was too young, poor child, to be trusted to make the journey alone; and, as I was obliged to stop at home and work to keep the other children, and pay back what we borrowed for the trip, of course you were the proper person, after me, to go with Susan; whose welfare is a more precious possession to us than any money, I am sure. Besides, when I married you, and took you away to Cornwall, I always promised you a trip to London to see your friends again; and now that promise is performed. So, once again, don't fret about the money that's been spent: I shall soon pay it back.

I've got some very strange news for you, Mary. You know how bad work was getting at the mine, before you went away—so bad, that I thought to myself after you had gone: "Hadn't I better try what I can do in the fishing at T——?"

And I went there ; and, thank God, have got on well by it. I can turn my hand to most things ; and the fishing has been very good this year. So I have stuck to my work at T——. And now I come to my news.

The landlady at the inn here, is, as you know, a sort of relation of mine. Well, the third afternoon after you had gone, I was stopping to say a word to her at her own door, on my way to the beach, when we saw a young gentleman, quite a stranger, coming up to us. He looked very pale and wild-like, I thought, when he asked for a bed ; and then got faint all of a sudden—so faint and ill, that I was obliged to lend a hand in getting him up stairs. The next morning I heard he was worse ; and it was just the same story the morning after. He quite frightened the landlady, he was so restless, and talked to himself in such a

strange way ; specially at night. He wouldn't say what was the matter with him, or who he was : we could only find out, that he had been stopping among the fishing-people further west ; and that they had not behaved very well to him at last—more shame for them ! I'm sure they could take no hurt from the poor young fellow, let him be whom he may. Well, the end of it was that I went and fetched the doctor for him myself ; and when we got into his room, we found him all pale and trembling, and looking at us, poor soul, as if he thought we meant to murder him. The doctor gave his complaint some hard names which I don't know how to write down ; but it seems there's more the matter with his mind than his body, and that he must have had some great fright which has shaken his nerves all to pieces. The only way to do him good, as the doctor said, was to have

him carefully nursed by his relations, and kept quiet among people he knew ; strange faces about him being likely to make him worse. He seemed, you know, to be pining for his home. The doctor asked where his friends lived ; but he wouldn't say ; and, lately, he's got so much worse that he can't speak clearly to us at all.

Yesterday evening, he gave us all a fright. The doctor hearing me below, asking after him, said I was to come upstairs and help to move him to have his bed made. As soon as I raised him up (though I'm sure I touched him as gently as I could), he fainted dead away. While he was being brought to, a little piece of something that looked like card-board, prettily embroidered with beads and silk, came away from a string that held it round his neck, and dropped off the bedside. I picked it up ; for I remembered the time, Mary, when you and I were

courting, and how precious the least thing was to me that belonged to you. So I took care of it for him, thinking it might be a keepsake from his sweetheart. And sure enough, when he came to, he put up his thin white hands to his neck, and looked so thankful at me when I tied the little thing again to the string! Just as I had done that, the doctor beckons me to the other end of the room.

“This won’t do,” says he to me in a whisper. “If he goes on like this, he’ll lose his reason—if not his life. I must search his papers to find out what friends he has; and you must be my witness.”

So the doctor opens his little bag; and takes out a square sealed packet first; then two or three letters tied together—the poor soul looking all the while as if he longed to prevent us from touching them. Well: the doctor said there was no occasion to

open the packet, for the direction was the same on all the letters, and the name corresponded with his initials marked on his linen.

“ I’m next to certain this is where he lives, or did live: so this is where I’ll write,” says the doctor.

“ Shall my wife take the letter, Sir?” says I. “ She’s in London with our girl, Susan; and, if his friends should be gone away from where you’re writing to, she may be able to trace them.”

“ Quite right, Penhale,” says he; “ we’ll do that. Write to your wife and put my letter inside your’s.”

I did as he told me, at once; and his letter is inside this, with the direction of the house and the street.

Now, Mary dear, go at once, and see what you can find out. The direction on the doctor’s letter maybe his home; and if it

isn't, there may be people there who can tell you where it is. So go at once ; and let us know directly what luck you have had—for there's no time to be lost ; and if you saw the young gentleman, you would pity him as much as we do.

This has got to be such a long letter that I have no room left to write any more. God bless you, Mary ; and God bless my darling Susan ! Give her a kiss for father's sake ; and believe me,

Your loving husband,

WILLIAM PENHALE.

LETTER II.

FROM MARY PENHALE TO HER HUSBAND.

Dearest William,

Susan sends a hundred kisses and best loves to you and her brothers and sisters. She's getting on nicely ; and her mistress is as kind and fond of her as can be. Best respects, too, from my sister, Martha, and her husband. And now I've done giving you all my messages, I'll tell you some good news for the poor young gentleman who is so bad at T——.

As soon as I had seen Susan, and read your letter to her, I went to the place where the doctor's letter directed me. Such a grand house, William ! I was really afraid to knock at the door. So I plucked up courage, and gave a pull at the bell ; and a very fat big man, with his head all plastered over with powder, opened the door, almost before I had done ringing. " If you please, Sir," says I, showing him the name on the doctor's letter, " do any friends of this gentleman's live here ?"—" To be sure they do !" says he. " His father and sister live here : but what do you want to know for ?"—" I want them to read this letter," says I. " It's to tell them that the young gentleman is very bad in health, down in our country."—" You can't see my master," says he ; " for he's confined to his bed by illness : and Miss Clara is very poorly too—you had better leave the letter with me." Just as he said this, an

elderly lady crossed the hall (I found out she was the housekeeper afterwards), and asked what I wanted. When I told her, she looked quite startled. "Step this way, Ma'am," says she: "you will do Miss Clara more good than all the doctors put together. But you must break the news to her carefully, before she sees the letter. Please to make it out better news than it is; for the young lady is in very delicate health." We went up stairs—such stair-carpets! I was almost frightened to step on them, after walking through the dirty streets. The housekeeper opened a door; and said a few words inside, which I could not hear; and then let me in where the young lady was.

Oh, William! she had the sweetest, kindest face I ever saw in my life. But it was so pale, and there was such a sad look in her eyes when she asked me to sit down,

that it went to my heart, when I thought of the news I had to tell her. I couldn't speak just at first; and I suppose she thought I was in some trouble—for she took my hand, and begged me not to tell her what I wanted, till I was better. She said it with such a voice and such a look, that, like a great fool, I burst out crying, instead of answering as I ought. But it did me good though, and made me able to tell her about her brother (breaking it as gently as I could) before I gave her the doctor's letter. She never opened it; but stood up before me as if she was turned to stone—not able to cry, or speak, or move. It frightened me so, to see her in such a dreadful state, that I forgot all about the grand house, and the difference there was between us; and took her in my arms, making her sit down on the sofa by me—just as I should do, if I was consoling our own

Susan under some great trouble. Well ! I soon made her look more like herself, comforting her in every way I could think of : and she laid her poor head on my shoulder, and I took and kissed her (not remembering a bit about its being a born lady and a stranger that I was kissing) ; and the tears came at last, and did her good. As soon as she could speak, she thanked God her brother was found, and had fallen into kind hands. She hadn't courage to read the doctor's letter herself, and asked me to do it. Though he gave a very bad account of the young gentleman, he said that care and nursing, and getting him away from a strange place to his own home and among his friends, might do wonders for him yet. When I came to this part of the letter, she started up, and asked me to give it to her. Then, she inquired when I was going back to Cornwall ; and I said "as soon as

possible," (for, indeed, it's time I was home, William). "Wait; pray wait till I have shown this letter to my father!" says she. And she ran out of the room with it in her hand.

After some time, she came back with her face all of a flush, like; looking quite different to what she did before, and saying that I had done more to make the family happy by coming with that letter, than she could ever thank me for as she ought. A gentleman followed her in, who was her eldest brother (she said)—the pleasantest liveliest gentleman I ever saw. He shook hands as if he had known me all his life; and told me I was the first person he had ever met with who had done good in a family by bringing them bad news. Then, he asked me whether I was ready to go to Cornwall the next morning with him, and the young lady, and a friend of his who was a doctor. I had thought already

of getting the parting over with poor Susan, that very day : so I said, “ Yes.” After that, they wouldn’t let me go away till I had had something to eat and drink ; and the dear, kind young lady asked me all about Susan, and where she was living, and about you and the children, just as if she had known us like neighbours. Poor thing ! she was so flurried, and so anxious for the next morning, that it was all the gentleman could do to keep her quiet, and prevent her falling into a sort of laughing and crying fit, which it seems she had been liable to lately. At last they let me go away ; and I went and stayed with Susan as long as I could before I bid her good-by. She bore the parting bravely—poor, dear child ! God in Heaven bless her ;—and I’m sure He will ; for a better daughter no mother ever had.

My dear husband, I am so afraid this letter is very badly written : but the tears are

in my eyes, thinking of Susan ; and I feel so wearied and flurried after what has happened. We are to go off very early to-morrow morning in a carriage, which is to be put on the railway. Only think of my riding home in a fine carriage, with gentlefolks !—how surprised Willie, and Nancy, and the other children will be ! I shall get to T—, almost as soon as my letter ; but I thought I would write, so that you might have the good news, the first moment it could get to you, to tell the poor young gentleman. I'm sure it must make him better, only to hear that his brother and sister are coming to fetch him home.

I can't write any more, dear William, I'm so very tired—except that I long to see you and the little ones again ; and that I am,

Your loving and dutiful wife,

MARY PENHALE.

LETTER III.

TO MR. JOHN BERNARD, FROM THE WRITER
OF THE FOREGOING AUTOBIOGRAPHY.

[This letter is nearly nine years later in date than
the letters which precede it.]

Lanreath Cottage, ——shire.

My dear Friend,

I find, by your last letter, that you doubt
whether I still remember the circumstances
under which I made a certain promise to you,
more than eight years ago. You are mis-
taken : not one of those circumstances has

escaped my memory. To satisfy you of this, I will now recapitulate them. You will own, I think, that I have forgotten nothing.

After my removal from Cornwall (shall I ever forget the first sight of Clara and Ralph at my bedside !), when the serious nervous malady from which I suffered so long, had yielded to the affectionate devotion of my family, aided by the untiring exercise of your skill, one of my first anxieties was to show that I could gratefully appreciate your exertions for my good, by reposing the same confidence in you, which I should place in my nearest and dearest relatives. From the time when we first met at the hospital, your services were devoted to me, through much misery of mind and body, with the heartiness, the delicacy, and the self-denial of a true friend. I felt that it was only your due that you should know by what trials I had been reduced to the situation in which

you found me, when you accompanied my brother and sister to Cornwall—I felt this; and placed in your hands, for your own private perusal, the narrative which I had written of my error and of its terrible consequences. To tell you all that had happened to me, with my own lips, was more than I could do then, and even after this lapse of years, would be more than I could do now.

After you had read the narrative, you urged me, on returning it into my possession, to permit its publication during my lifetime. I granted the justice of the reasons which led you to counsel me thus; I admitted the security which concealment of names, places, and dates gave against the chance that the identity of any one of the actors in my story might be discovered—but I told you, at the same time, that one other obstacle, which I was bound to respect, would prevent me from following your advice. While my father lived,

I could not suffer a manuscript in which he was represented (no matter under what excess of provocation) as separating himself in the bitterest hostility from his own son, to be made public property. I could not suffer events of which we never afterwards spoke ourselves, to be given to others in the form of a printed narrative which might perhaps fall under his own eye. You acknowledged, I remember, the justice of these considerations ; and promised, in case I died before him, to keep back my manuscript from publication as long as my father lived. In binding yourself to that engagement, however, you stipulated, and I agreed, that I should reconsider your arguments in case I outlived him ; and should allow them their full force, when the obstacle to which I alluded existed no longer. This was my promise, and these were the circumstances under which it was made. You will allow, I think, that my

memory is more accurate than you had imagined it to be.

And now, you write to remind me of *my* part of our agreement—forbearing, with your accustomed delicacy, to introduce the subject, until more than six months have elapsed since my father's death. And you have done well. I have had time to feel all the consolation afforded to me by the remembrance that, for years past, my life was of some use in sweetening my father's; that his death has occurred in the ordinary course of Nature; and that I never, to my own knowledge, gave him any cause to repent the full and loving reconciliation which took place between us, as soon as we could speak together freely after my return to home.

Still I am not answering your question:—Am I now willing to permit the publication of my narrative, provided all names and places mentioned in it remain concealed, and

I am known to no one but yourself, Ralph, and Clara as the writer of my own story. I reply that I *am* willing. In a few days, you will receive the manuscript by a safe hand. Neither my brother nor my sister object to its being made public on the terms I have mentioned ; and I feel no hesitation in accepting the permission thus accorded to me. I have not glossed over the flightiness of Ralph's character ; but the brotherly kindness and manly generosity which lie beneath it, are as apparent, I hope, in my narrative as they are in fact. And Clara, dear Clara !—all that I have said of her is only to be regretted as unworthy of the loveliest and noblest subject that my pen, or any other pen, can have to write on !

One difficulty, however, still remains : —How are the pages which I am about to send you to be concluded ? In the novel-reading sense of the word, my story has no

real conclusion. The repose that comes to all of us after trouble—to *me*, a repose in life : to others, how often a repose only in the grave ! —is the end which must close this autobiography : an end, calm, natural, and uneventful ; yet not, perhaps, devoid of all lesson and value. Is it fit that I should set myself, for the sake of effect, to *make* a conclusion, and terminate by fiction what has begun, and, thus far, has proceeded in truth ? In the interests of Art, as well as in the interests of Reality, surely not !

Whatever remains to be related after the last entry in my journal, will be found expressed in the simplest, the truest, and therefore, the best form, by the letters from William, and Mary Penhale, which I send you with this. When I revisited Cornwall, to see the good miner and his wife, and to express in person my gratitude for their watchful and admirable kindness towards

me, I found, in the course of the inquiries which I made as to the past, that they still preserved the letters they had written about me, while I lay ill at T—. I asked permission to take copies of these two documents, as containing materials, which I could but ill supply from my own resources, for filling up a gap in my story. They at once consented ; telling me that they had always kept each other's letters after marriage, as carefully as they kept them before, in token that their first affection remained to the last unchanged. At the same time, however, they entreated me, with the most earnest and perfect simplicity, to polish and refine their own good, homely expressions ; and turn them, as they phrased it, into something like proper reading. You may easily imagine that I knew better than to do this ; and you will, I am sure, agree with me that both the letters I send should be printed as literally, as they

were copied by my hand. The natural language of kindness carries with it an eloquence of its own, which Art may sometimes imitate, but can never hope to improve.

Having now provided for the continuation of my story to the period of my return home, I have a word or two to say on the subject of preparing the autobiography for press. I have not the resolution, even now, to look over my manuscript again ; so I freely leave the corrections it requires to others—but on one condition. Let none of the passages in which I have related events, or described characters, be either softened or suppressed. I am well aware of the tendency, in some readers, to denounce truth itself as improbable, unless their own personal experience has borne witness to it ; and it is on this very account that I am firm in my determination to allow of no cringing beforehand to anticipated incredulities. What I have written is

Truth; and it shall go into the world as Truth should — entirely uncompromised; honest and pure in its own identity. Let my style be corrected as completely as you will; but leave characters and events which are taken from realities, real as they are.

In regard to the surviving persons with whom this narrative associates me, I have little to say which it can concern the ordinary reader to know. The man whom I have presented in the preceding pages under the name of Sherwin, is, I believe, still alive, and still residing in France—whither he retreated soon after the date of the last events mentioned in my autobiography. A new system had been introduced into his business by his assistant, which when left to his own unaided resources, he failed to carry out. His affairs got involved; a commercial crisis occurred, which he was

wholly unable to meet; and he became a bankrupt, having first dishonestly secured to himself a subsistence for life, out of the wreck of his property. I accidentally heard of him, a few years since, as maintaining among the English residents of the town he then inhabited, the character of a man who had undeservedly suffered from severe family misfortunes, and who bore his afflictions with the most exemplary piety and resignation.

To those once connected with him, who are now no more, I need not and cannot refer again. That part of the dreary Past with which they are associated, is the part which I still shrink in terror from thinking on. There are two names which my lips have not uttered for years; which, in this life, I shall never speak again. Those names, and the memories they would bring with them, it is not fit and not possible for me

to revive in this place. The night of Death is over them: a night to look away from for evermore.

Yes! to look away from—but, towards what object? The Future? That way, I see but dimly even yet. It is on the Present that my thoughts are fixed, in the contentment which desires no change. For the last five months I have lived here with Clara—here, on the little estate which was once her mother's, which is now her's. Long before my father's death we often talked, in the great country house, of future days which we might pass together, as we pass them now, in this place. Though we may often leave it for a time, still we shall always look back to Lanreath Cottage as to our home. The years of retirement which I spent at the Hall, after my recovery, have not awakened in me a single longing to return to the busy world. Ralph—now the

head of our family; now really aroused by his new duties to a sense of his new position —Ralph, already emancipated from many of the habits which once enthralled and degraded him, has written, bidding me employ to the utmost the resources which his position enables him to offer me, if I decide on entering into public life. But I have no such purpose: I am still resolved to live on in obscurity, in retirement, in peace. I have suffered too much; I have been wounded too sadly, to range myself with the heroes of Ambition, and fight my way upward from the ranks. The glory and the glitter which I once longed to look on as my own, would dazzle and destroy me, now. Such shocks as I have endured, leave that behind them which changes the character and the purpose of a life. The mountain-path of Action is no longer a path for *me*;

my future hope pauses with my present happiness in the shadowed valley of Repose.

Not a repose which owns no duty, and is good for no use ; not a repose which Thought cannot ennoble, and Affection cannot sanctify. To serve the cause of the poor and the ignorant, in the little sphere which now surrounds me ; to smoothe the way for pleasure and plenty, where pain and want have turned it rugged too long ; to strengthen my mind with such knowledge as may make it fitter than it has yet been for the Eye that is above us to look into ; to live more and more worthy, with every day, of the sisterly love which, never tiring, never changing, watches over me in this last retreat, this dearest home—these are the purposes, the only purposes left, which I may still cherish. Let me but live to fulfil them, and life will have given to me all that I can ask !

I may now close my letter. I have communicated to you all the materials I can supply for the conclusion of my autobiography, and have furnished you with the only directions I wish to give in reference to its publication. Present it to the reader in any form, and at any time, that you think fit. On its reception by the public I have no wish to speculate. It is enough for me to know that, with all its faults, it has been written in sincerity and in truth—written with such earnestness of motive and such humility of spirit, as will equally preserve me from false shame at its failure, or false pride at its success.

If there be any further information which you think it necessary to possess, and which I have forgotten to communicate, write to me on the subject—or, far better, come here yourself, and ask of me with your own lips

all that you desire to know. Come, and judge of the life I am now leading, and shall continue to lead, by seeing it as it really is. Though it be only for a few days, pause long enough in your career of activity and usefulness, of fame and honour, to find leisure time for a visit to the cottage where we live. This is as much Clara's invitation as mine. She will never forget (even if I could !) all that I have owed to your friendship—will never weary (even if I should tire !) of showing you that we are capable of deserving it. Come, then ; and see *her* as well as *me*—see her, once more, my sister of old times ! When I now look on her, and behold her again the same Clara in face, in voice, in manner, in pure serenity of heart and mind, that she was before the days when my fatal error brought affliction and shame to her and to all our household—then, indeed, I enjoy

the most perfect and the most inexhaustible of all the consolations and all the pleasures that I can still feel. I remember what you said of Clara, when we last met, and last talked of her; and I believe you will be almost as happy to see her again in her old character, as I am.

Till then, farewell! Do not judge hastily of my motives for persisting in the life of retirement which I have led for so many years past. Do not think that calamity has chilled my heart, or enervated my mind. Past suffering may have changed, but it has not deteriorated me—nay, it has fortified my spirit with a good and an abiding strength; it has told me plainly, much that was but dimly revealed to me before; it has shown me uses to which I may put my existence, that have their sanction from other voices than the voices of Fame; it has taught me to feel that bravest ambition which is vigorous

enough to overleap the little life here! Is there no aspiration in the purposes for which I would now live?—Bernard! whatever we can do of good, in this world, with our affections or our faculties, rises to the Eternal World above us, as a song of praise from Humanity to God. Amid the thousand, thousand tones ever joining to swell the holy music of that song, are those which sound loudest and grandest *here*, the tones which travel sweetest and purest up to the Imperishable Throne; which mingle in the perfectest harmony with the anthem of the angel-choir? A solemn and an awful question!—let your own heart answer it; and then say, may not the obscurest life—even a life like mine—be dignified by a lasting aspiration, and dedicated to a noble aim?

I have done. The calm summer evening has stolen on me while I have been writing

to you ; and Clara's voice—now the happy voice of the happy old times—calls to me from our garden seat to come out and look at the sunset over the distant sea. Once more —farewell !

THE END.

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